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CLAUDIA.

A TALE.

By

A. L. O. E.

*Author of "The Shepherd of Bethlehem," "Exiles in Babylon,"
"Rescued from Egypt," "Hebrew Heroes," &c.*



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THE object which I have had before me in writing the following tale, has been to show the distinction between the intellectual and the spiritual, and the insufficiency of mental powers, even though they be of a high order, either to render their possessor wise unto salvation, or to make him a fit instrument to accomplish a lofty mission amongst men. I am painfully aware that I have not carried out my design as I would have wished, that my work is a very imperfect one ; but I humbly commend it to Him whose blessing alone can render it useful, and who knows under what a sense of weakness I have penned my little story.

A. L. O. E.



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CLAUDIA.

CHAPTER I.

IN SEARCH OF A FRIEND.

“ HOPE that I have found a friend at last and that on my fancy's magical mirror there will not be a shadow or a stain.”

So mused Claudia Hartswood, as she stood alone by her open window, looking forth on an extensive prospect of wood and dale, bathed in the glowing sunlight of June. Tall and fair, with luxuriant tresses, and brown eyes that sparkled with intelligence under their long dark lashes, Claudia looked—as she was—a clever, high-spirited girl, to whom life had hitherto been all brightness. A physiognomist might also have traced resolute energy on the countenance of the young maiden. Claudia was not one to fold her hands in lazy ease, or, regarding life as a banquet, contentedly sit down to enjoy it. Girl as she was, Claudia looked upon the world

before her as some young untried knight might have looked upon the lists in which he hoped to win renown, or the field on which he was to show that he merited his spurs. Claudia, with much imagination, but little experience, and an energy of purpose which she mistook for consciousness of strength, had something of the spirit of a female Don Quixote: she had a tolerably clear idea of the enemy with whom she had to deal, but not of the nature of the conflict, nor of the weapons with which alone it could be carried on with success.

“The world is full of sham, humbug, and deceit; and the mission of every true-hearted woman is to expose, resist, and overcome it.”

This was the sentence which Claudia had written on the first page of her journal when she had completed her fifteenth year, and deemed that she had left childhood and childish things for ever behind her. Claudia acted as one conscious of a mission so lofty. She was herself open as the day, and showed no mercy to those who were less so. Her own position was favourable to truthfulness of character: she had had little temptation to wear the cloak of deceit, for she had neither needed it as a means of winning favour nor of shrouding herself from tyranny—she knew not what it was either to fawn or to fear. Claudia was the only child of a

parent who himself possessed a high and chivalrous sense of honour, and who would have pardoned anything rather than a falsehood. Very proud was Claudia of her father; a man who was pursuing a brilliant career in the law with clean hands and conscience unstained; a man who had stooped to no quibble, been detected in no trick, against whose character enmity itself could harbour no suspicion. It would have been as strange if the daughter of such a man had been deceitful or false, as if she had failed to learn to speak her native language with correctness.

Though no reserve existed between Mr. Hartswood and his daughter, and their intercourse was more familiar than that which is usual between father and child, Claudia had long yearned for a companion of her own sex and age: she was almost as enthusiastic in her ideas of friendship as she was in those of truth, but she had not succeeded hitherto in finding a friend. While her father had resided in London, Claudia had had several playmates and companions, but none in whom she could thoroughly confide, none in whom she recognized a sister-soul congenial to her own. Perhaps her requirements were too great, or her indulgence for human weakness too small, for her attempts to form a friendship had always ended in disappointment. At one time

Claudia had taken a strong girlish fancy for Euphemia Long, a lively pretty woman, several years older than herself. Euphemia possessed considerable personal attractions, and the imagination of her young admirer invested her with many more. The discovery that Euphemia owed her chignon to the hair-dresser, and her roses to the rouge-box, was the means of disenchanting Claudia Hartwood. As soon as she found out that art—to her another name for deceit—was employed to enhance beauty, the beauty itself, to her eyes, melted away for ever.

“False hair and false bloom!” muttered Claudia, as with a feeling of disappointment not unmixed with contempt she quitted the presence of Euphemia, whom she had chanced to find at her toilette. “Never can I give my affection to one who lives in a habit of deceit, stooping for fashion’s sake—or folly’s sake—to do what Jezebel did! No subject of King Sham shall ever be the friend of my heart!”

In the artificial state of London society perfect transparency of character was not easily to be found, and this was the first qualification which Claudia required in a friend. She had read of the magic mirror employed by an Eastern prince to guide him in the choice of a pure-minded girl, none being worthy but she whose image should be reflected on it without a mist or a stain. Claudia carried such

a mirror within her own mind, and applied it by watchful observation to the different girls whom she knew.

"I can make allowance for a little temper or a little pride, nay, even a little selfishness," thought Claudia; "but for insincerity—never! No veneer or varnish for me!"

At last Claudia believed that she had met with success in her search. Annie Goldie, a merry, plain-spoken, light-hearted girl, who always uttered what came uppermost, even at the hazard of giving pain or offence, appeared to be one who—whatever faults she might have—was at least free from the shadow of guile. Far less pleasing than Euphemia, Annie was at least more straightforward and honest. "I can trust her," reflected Claudia, as she glanced at the somewhat ungainly person of her companion. "That rough hair is at least her own, and if she has rather too much colour, the rouge-box has had nothing to do with it. Annie may not think much before she speaks, but at any rate she speaks what she thinks."

So thought Claudia, until a trifling incident led her to change her opinion, and detect the shadow of deceit on the character even of the frank Annie Goldie.

The two girls had gone together to a fancy

bazaar, on the afternoon of its closing day, to make a joint purchase of a wedding-present for a companion. The wearied ladies behind the stalls, anxious to clear off the remains of their pretty trifles, were selling them at prices far below what had been asked on the preceding day.

"What an exquisite pair of embroidered white silk slippers!" cried Claudia, approaching a stall.

"Exactly what we want," observed Annie; "I never saw anything prettier. But they cost more than we mean to give; you see the mark upon them, twelve shillings."

"You shall have them for six," said the lady who presided at the counter, knowing that the delicate trifles had already done duty at three fancy fairs.

Claudia and Annie gladly made the purchase: the former was about to pull off the tiny ticket of price when her companion stopped her.

"Don't pull that off, just tuck it under, as if it had escaped our notice. Clara will think, you know, that we paid twelve shillings for her present."

"Do you wish her to think it?" cried Claudia abruptly, looking Annie full in the face.

"There is no harm if she does," laughed the girl; "she will give us credit for having done the handsome thing."

Claudia for her only reply tore off the ticket,

threw it on the floor, and set her foot upon it. From that hour she cared no more for the society of Annie Goldie.

“What fickleness!” thought Annie.

“What falsehood!” mused Claudia.

Perhaps both were somewhat harsh in their verdicts.

Soon after the occurrence of this slight incident, Claudia accompanied her father to Friern Hatch, a country residence which he had chosen as being near enough to London to enable him to pursue his daily business, and yet sufficiently retired from the city and its far extending suburbs to afford him the luxury of perfect seclusion amongst the beauties of Nature.

Claudia was delighted at the change from a dingy, noisy street, to green meadows, verdant groves, and romantic country lanes. After the incessant rattle of wheels, charming to her were the songs of birds and the bleating of sheep. Many a time the young enthusiast repeated to herself the well-known line, “God made the country, man the town;” and she rejoiced that with peaceful, holy Nature around her, she was at last beyond the false conventionalities of modern society, or, as she herself would have said, “out of the domains of King Sham.”

But after a while the old yearning for companionship came upon Claudia more strongly than ever. She accompanied her father to the railway-station each morning, she had his society each evening, but the whole of the rest of the day the young girl had to pass by herself. She had the resources of music, poetry, and rambles through meadow and grove; but Claudia felt that these pleasures would be a thousandfold enhanced by being shared with some congenial companion. At Friern Hatch Claudia had no near neighbours with whom she could hold intercourse, except the family of Mr. Holder, the vicar; and it was with no small interest that Miss Hartswood awaited the first visit of those on whom she would be dependent in a great measure for society in her secluded home.

Claudia first met the Holders on a Sunday, on their way to the village church. The vicar's wife was a stout motherly-looking woman, with high-cheek bones and rosy complexion, who certainly appeared in no need of the support of the arm of her rather sickly husband. The pair were followed by a tribe of sons of all ages and sizes, from the big awkward school-boy who had outgrown his clothes, to the red-haired little urchin who wore a blue frock, manufactured by his mother out of some deposed garment of her own. In none of these could Claudia

look for a companion ; but she saw with satisfaction that the squad of boys was headed by a girl of about her own age, simply but neatly attired, and without any of that affectation of manner which Claudia called "vencer and varnish."

Mrs. Holder, accompanied by her daughter Emma, called at Friern Hatch on the following day, and Claudia soon returned the visit. Her glimpse at the interior of a country parsonage left a pleasant impression on the mind of the lawyer's daughter. She found Emma busily engaged in helping her mother to cut down the old worn shirts of the older boys to make new ones for the younger. And yet this was a girl who, on her visit to Friern Hatch, had told Claudia that poetry was her greatest delight, and that she much preferred reading to working.

"Here is a simple, true-hearted creature," thought Claudia, "sacrificing refined tastes to homely duties; leaving the pleasant fields of literature to snip away linen, and patch up old clothes! If perfect candour and sincerity are to be found upon earth, they may surely be sought in one brought up in a quiet home like this, ignorant of the world, its follies and its deceits. I believe that I have met with a congenial companion at last."

An invitation to Emma to spend some hours at

Friern Hatch was eagerly given and gladly accepted. If Claudia enjoyed the prospect of holding social converse with a young friend instead of the solitude which was beginning to grow very irksome, Emma, on her part, was delighted at the break in the monotony of her busy life. Hearing Tommy repeat his Latin declensions, dictating to Harry, giving spelling-lessons to Jemmy, or counting out clothes for the wash, were occupations from which Emma was glad to escape for awhile to the pleasant ease and refined elegance of Claudia Hartswood's home. Miss Hartswood herself was an object of strong attraction to the vicar's daughter, who, under a shy, quiet manner, had a good deal of romance in her nature, and who had already begun, after the common fashion of girls of fifteen, to make a heroine for herself out of the bright intelligent young being who had taken her fancy at first sight. Friendship is usually a compound article, made up of various ingredients, and girls' friendships have the reputation (though often unjustly) of being flimsy, and little likely to last. Mere cobwebs of fancy, gossamer threads of romance, united together by a similarity of tastes which is deemed sympathy of feeling, are not likely to bear long the wear and tear of everyday life. Time dims the tints of the light fabric, or some slight difference tears it asunder, leaving a

rent which is never repaired. It remains to be seen whether the friendship between Claudia and Emma would prove to be of a firmer texture, and whether the former was justified in the hope with the expression of which this chapter commenced.





CHAPTER II.

LIGHT CHAT ON GRAVE THEMES.

THE girls passed an hour pleasantly together in that easy familiar converse in which the young delight. Claudia showed to her visitor her little trinkets and treasures, spoke of her favourite authors, displayed her collection of nicely bound books. The tastes of the two girls seemed to resemble each other, though the stamp on the character of each was very dissimilar, as must have been evident even to a careless observer. Claudia was an eager, animated speaker, bending forward from the impetus with which she poured out the tide of her own ideas, or those which she had drawn from intercourse with her father; while Emma sat, a placid, smiling listener, expressing acquiescence in sentiments uttered by her friend rather by glance and gesture than by words. It is doubtful whether the lawyer's daughter would have been equally well pleased with a companion who should have rivalled her in gifts, especially that of giving ready expres-

sion to thought. There is no market more likely to be overstocked than the conversation market, in which—at least where young ladies are concerned—the producers of talk usually outnumber the silent consumers.

“You have a beautiful view from this window,” observed Emma, as Claudia paused after drawing a comparison between the respective attractions of town and country. “Your prospect is so much more open than ours, for we are very much shut in by trees.”

“This house stands high, and I am glad that it does so,” said Claudia, “I like to live on the summit of a hill, where one can breathe the pure air freely, and have nothing to hide from view the blue sky above, or the wide-spreading prospect around! Give me a clear view in everything,—let there be no mist, no screen, were it but of flowering shrubs! I always choose to see a long way before me, and to see clearly.” The mind of Claudia had wandered from the natural to the mental prospect, as she gazed down on the expanse of landscape beneath her.

“What a picturesque object is the convent as seen from hence,” observed Emma; “I did not know that it stood so near to your house.”

“Were you ever in that convent?” asked Claudia.

“Oh! never,” replied the vicar’s daughter. “My

father was vexed at a convent being built in our parish, and would never allow one of his family to enter the door."

"Nor will my father," observed Claudia Hartswood. "I once told papa that I was curious to visit a convent, and question the nuns as to how they like the prison-life which they lead; but papa forbade me to hold intercourse of any kind with the Romanist ladies. I often look at those gables between the trees, or catch a glimpse of dark robes passing across the little open space yonder, with something of the longing for forbidden fruit,—which is, I suppose, a part of woman's nature. Doubtless one would get a knowledge of good and evil by being better acquainted with convent life,—I suspect more of the evil than of the good."

"I suppose that your father was afraid that, living so much alone as you do, if you met much with Romanists, you might be led into their errors," said Emma.

"Papa need not have been in the least afraid of that," observed Claudia, with a proud smile. "No system that has so much deceit as its basis as Popery has, could have the slightest hold on my mind; my natural love for straightforward truth is too strong. I love pure daylight so much better than the feeble many-coloured light which struggles in through

stained glass, however curious and graceful the pattern may be."

"Do you consider that all Romanists are deceivers?" inquired Emma Holder.

"No; I think that the greatest number of them are the deceived," was Claudia Hartswood's reply. "As papa says, they have doctrines which shut them in as a wall,—doctrines that have deceit as their very foundation. Look, for instance, at their notion of the infallibility of the Pope!"

"I think that I have heard that not all Roman Catholics hold it," said Emma.

"Not all, perhaps, but a great many do; and think to what a state of darkness a mind must be brought before such a doctrine can be believed! Why, were the Romanists to read the Bible they must see that not St. Peter himself was infallible, his brother apostle had to reprove him to his face! Can we believe that any Pope in his senses believes himself to be infallible? and if he does not,"—Claudia's eyes flashed indignation as she went on,—"*he must know himself to be a party to a deception; he must know that he is mixing error with truth, and that a religion in which a fiction is tolerated,—is enforced,—is not, cannot be, a religion from Heaven!*"

"I wonder," observed Emma, "whether well educated Romanists really believe in all the strange

miracles which are said to have been worked by their saints."

"There are many of them,—so I have heard from papa,—much too sensible and clear-sighted to believe a tenth part of what the ignorant believe," said Claudia. "Do you suppose that the priests themselves put faith in winking pictures, or weeping statues, in cures made by little bits of bones, or in the power of money to buy souls out of purgatory? But they must know that the ignorant have believed, and will believe, in such things; that though the enlightened may not worship the dolls dressed up to represent the Virgin which they have in some of their churches, yet that the poor people do. Why then do not enlightened Romanists with one accord raise up their voices against what they know to be degrading superstition,—why do they not all protest against the mixture of error with truth? Because," continued the lawyer's daughter, answering her own question, with the animation of a special pleader, "because they are afraid to meddle with the building lest they should pull it down over their own heads, knowing, as they must do, that credulous superstition is the very cement which fastens the stones together."

"Your father need not be afraid of your ever becoming a Romanist," observed Emma with a smile

at the impulsive eloquence of her young companion ;
“you would be more likely to draw over the nuns to your side, than let them win you over to theirs.”

“That is what I feel,” said Claudia Hartwood.
“I am always on my guard wherever I can see the serpent’s trail of deceit. It is strange how constantly it meets one’s eyes in the world. Have you ever tried to classify the different kinds of deceit ?” asked the lawyer’s daughter abruptly.

Emma was not given to the study of metaphysics, nor indeed to severe thought upon any subject. Her range of mental vision had been circumscribed like the prospect from her home. It was a strange and amusing novelty to Emma to be brought into contact with one like Claudia, possessing an intellect cultivated and vigorous, all unripe as it certainly was. Emma scarcely understood her new companion, but perhaps from that very circumstance thought her wonderfully clever ; and Claudia, secretly gratified to see the impression which she was making, did not distinguish between her own love of admiration and ardour for truth.

“What different kinds of deceit do you mean ?” asked Emma, her mild gray eyes sinking under the animated gaze of those of her companion.

“Ah ! perhaps you have not studied the subject,” cried Claudia. “Living always, as you do, in the

country, it has been less brought before your mind. I'm very fond of dividing, and classifying, and examining such matters thoroughly ; you see I'm so much alone, I've so much time for reflection, and papa is training me to think." Poor Claudia, with all her intelligence, did not perceive that the perpetual recurrence of "I" and "me" might become wearisome even to so patient a listener as Emma ; and that she herself was more bent on showing off her own acuteness, than on either amusing or instructing her friend. But what a luxury it was thus to talk, especially after so much enforced silence during the greater part of a fortnight !

"We have so many little matters to attend to in our home—trifles, but they take up time—that I cannot read or reflect as much as I should like," said Emma, whose memory recurred to darning stockings, mending collars, and hearing her brothers repeat lessons from the broken-backed Latin grammar ; "but I so enjoy conversation like this ; tell me how many kinds of deceit you have discovered in the world."

"I divide them, quite roughly of course, into three classes, lip-deceit, look-deceit, and heart-deceit. I like to follow a method. Papa says that study is nothing without method," remarked Claudia, who, as the reader may have observed, was constantly referring to the opinions of her parent.

"Lip-deceit is, of course, falsehood," said Emma. "There is no fault that we have been taught to hate so much as a lie."

"A lie is only one form of lip-deceit," observed Claudia; "there are all shades of it—black, blacker, and blackest—from exaggeration to perjury."

"Ah, exaggeration; you regard that as falsehood?" asked Emma.

"Of course I do; it is a stronger or weaker alloy of falsehood: and so is flattery, and all those words with little meaning, or no meaning, which pass current in the domains of King Sham. You wonder what I mean," continued Claudia laughing: "I must tell you of a little fancy of my own, which papa thought rather ingenious. I consider that adjectives are like coin, that should be of pure metal, that is truth, and have one definite scale of weight, known and recognized by us all." Emma smiled ready assent, though her companion was taking a flight rather beyond her comprehension. "Now," Claudia went on, "my great enemy, King Sham, has debased this coinage, so that there is utter confusion amongst the adjectives, and none can decide what they're worth. 'Awful,' 'tremendous,' 'infinite,' 'eternal,' which ought to be very heavy coin indeed, only used upon great occasions, are thrown about as if they were of no weight or value at all."

"I don't think that one can help this," observed Emma, who saw that she was expected to make some remark, and could only hit on a very commonplace one.

"If all persons who care for truth would make a steady stand, and never attempt to pass this false coinage," cried Claudia, "they might shame others into a little regard for correctness of speech. I'd have, for example, a regular scale of terms of endearment, just as we have a regular *gradation of letter-weights* there,"—Claudia pointed as she spoke to a little ornamental weigher which stood on her table. "'Dear,' 'very dear,' 'dearest,' 'darling,' and 'dearly beloved,' should each have their definite weight and meaning, exactly answering to the amount of affection which they should express. Now," continued Claudia, with a merry laugh, in which she was joined by Emma, "King Sham's subjects think that a mere pea, or pin's head of affection, or no affection at all, will justify the use of the very weightiest term of endearment in all the English dictionary."

"I don't just see how you could weigh and measure either adjectives or affection," said Emma, who felt that her companion was drawing her into an intellectual maze.

"True, the difficulty is to find something by which to regulate value, something of equal use to

everybody," said Claudia, who had some perplexity herself how to find her way out of it. "I really can think of no universal standard but that of eating," she continued gaily. "No one is really 'dear' to us for whom we would not give up our dinner; or 'very dear' for whom we would not give up dinner and tea besides—even that little afternoon cup of which we ladies are so fond."

"'Darling,' then, would show a willingness to fast for twenty-four hours at least," observed Emma Holder.

Claudia laughed and shrugged her shoulders. "I'm afraid," she said, "that one would find it more difficult to bring in a correct coinage of words, to have all pure unadulterated truth, than to persuade all the world to accept one uniform coinage of money. But though you may deem me, as I believe that most of my acquaintance deem me, an eccentric, fanciful theorist, always aiming at the impracticable, still you will allow that lip-deceit is a real evil, and that there may be some kind of credit in breaking a spear against it. One thing, Emma, if you will allow me to say it, that makes me fancy that you are one of whom I really can make a friend,"—Claudia, as she spoke, laid her hand on that of the vicar's daughter,—"*is that you have no flattery on your lips; you make no grand professions. I don't*

think that I have heard you use one superfluous 'dear,' and yet," she continued, rising at the sound of the luncheon-bell, "if your regard were put to the dinner test, I daresay that you would come off with more flying colours than many who would run through my whole graduated scale of adjectives, from the 'dear' to the 'dearly beloved.'"

And, arm in arm, the two laughing girls proceeded to the dining-room, in which an elegant little repast was laid out.





CHAPTER III.

LOOK-DECEIT AND HEART-DECEIT.

“**W**HAT a singular character this is, and how glad I am that she has come to our quiet corner of the world,” thought Emma, while Claudia was giving her attention to carving a delicate boiled chicken. Such a dainty little dish never appeared at the vicar’s table, where, as eight hungry mouths were always to be filled, quantity rather than quality was considered in choosing the fare. Emma silently glanced at the countenance of Claudia, with so much intelligence in the eyes, thought on the brow, decision on the lip, and wondered whether Miss Hartswood would have been a very different being had she been brought up in a hum-drum home, such as the vicarage appeared. If, instead of a clever lawyer to teach her to think and speak, and solitude to foster the habit of reflection, Claudia had had a sober, sensible mother, to set her to stitching and darning, and five noisy brothers who hated to see her with

a book in her hand, what would have been the result ?

Characters are much formed by circumstances, but under no circumstances would Claudia Hartswood have resembled Emma Holder. The latter, without the stimulus of necessity for exertion, would probably have sunk into a life of lazy ease, losing her health because she would have had little else to think of, and her spirits because she lacked energy to carve out occupation for herself. Claudia, on the other hand, as the vicar's daughter, would have eagerly plunged into parish work, and have rather exercised influence over her tribe of brothers than yielded to the petty tyranny of those whose wits were less keen than her own. Claudia would have been less theoretical but more practical than she was now ; her mental powers would have been developed in a different direction. The one girl needed the spur, and the other the bridle ; work at home was the former to Emma ; frequent solitude and the influence of her father's guiding mind were the latter to Claudia.

"And now let us proceed to the subject of *look-deceit*," said Claudia, as, having helped herself and her friend, she laid down the carver, and went on with her conversation more eagerly than with her dinner. "Look-deceit seems to me a kind of cob-

web-covering spread over all the world—the world that is called civilized I mean. There appears to be a general conspiracy to make objects look what they are not. Base metal must pass for gold ; stamped paper for embroidered lawn ; painted deal does duty as rosewood ; cotton is mixed with silk ; starch-powder with cloth, chicory with coffee—one can scarcely buy an article which is really what the seller pretends that it is. I fear that in most of our shops and manufactories King Sham reigns supreme.”

“I am afraid that it is so,” said Emma.

“And if we come from things to persons,” continued Claudia, “what a fearful amount of look-deceit do we find ! This lady must keep her carriage, though her butcher’s bill be unpaid ; because, to be seen in a cab or omnibus might betray the truth regarding her husband’s income. What servant upon Sundays is contented to appear to be—what she is—a servant ; she must pass for a lady at least in church, the place of all others where she should put away pride and deceit ! Now,” Claudia went on, as her chicken wing grew cold on her plate, “I was once asked by papa to define vulgarity, and I did not find it easy to give a reply ; it cost me a good deal of thinking before I could form a clear idea of what vulgarity is in its essence. It is

not poverty, it is not ignorance ; no little child could be justly called vulgar, though clothed in misery and rags."

"No," observed Emma Holder : "nor a labourer in his smockfrock."

"Nor a housemaid with her duster, nor a shopman at his business," said Claudia Hartswood. "But let servant, shopkeeper, or farmer, go out of his natural sphere, let him put on the dress and ape the manners of a class to which he has never belonged, and he becomes at once what we call vulgar. Papa laughed, and said that I was not far wrong when I told him at last that I thought that vulgarity was the livery worn by the suite of King Sham. 'Yes,' he cried, 'I dare be bound that the jackdaw in the fable looked a highly respectable bird, till she tried to pass off as a peacock, and then vulgarity came with her borrowed plumage.'"

"It must be delightful to have a father who will talk over such subjects," observed Emma ; though the thought crossed her mind that she was glad that her own simple-minded parent did not puzzle her brain with such troublesome questions.

"There is yet the third kind of deceit, *heart-deceit*, which we have not spoken about," said Claudia, after a little pause.

"That must be the worst of all," observed Emma.

"I suppose so," said Claudia, doubtfully ; - "but I own that I have not yet come to any very clear idea of what heart-deceit is."

"Is it not deceiving ourselves?" suggested Emma, timidly ; she was rather afraid of being drawn into a metaphysical disquisition.

"Your father is a clergyman, and mine is a lawyer," observed Claudia, "so yours has by profession more to do with guarding people against deceit in themselves, and mine against deceit in other people. But I hope that I shall not shock you very much," continued Claudia more slowly, and with some hesitation in her tone, "if I own that when some folk talk a great deal about their deceitful hearts, I suspect that there is sometimes sham in their talking. I have heard papa quote a line about 'Pride that apes humility,' and I fancy—I may, of course, be mistaken—I fancy that some people abuse their own hearts, because they think it proper and saint-like to do so, while they think them very good hearts after all."

Emma knew not what to reply. She suspected that her bright-eyed, self-confident companion was under some kind of error ; but she had never sufficiently exercised her own mind in observation or self-examination, to be able to handle the difficult subject before her.

"I don't like speaking of myself," said Claudia, after waiting in vain for the vicar's daughter to express an opinion; "but of course I know myself better than I can know any one else, and that's why I mention my own feelings." As she spoke, Claudia looked frankly into the face of her friend. "I am sure that I have *not* deceit in my heart, any more than on my lips or in my looks. I hate and abhor deceit wherever I see it; I know that I am not a hypocrite; I may be proud, self-willed, impetuous, ambitious, but I never can or will deceive either others—or myself!"

When spring first breathes on earth, have we not often seen the straight green sword-like shoots that pierce the sod, coming up erect and stiff, as if in defiance of the winter, that could not keep them down? Could fancy invest such a shoot with thought and speech, might not its language be something like this: "As I have risen, so will I rise, straight, unbending, growing higher and higher, till I touch yon blue covering which stretches above me, and wear one of its twinkling gems as a sparkling dewdrop upon my sharp point"? Poor aspiring shoot, it would soon find that its nature permitted it neither to reach the sky nor to win the star; that it could rise but to a limited point, and that but a very low one. It would find that if frosts did not

nip and destroy it, the very sun which had warmed it into life would make it open and disclose its heart to his beams—would soften the stiff sheath, and cause it to droop and bow down that the fairer flower might appear. The character of Claudia resembled such a shoot, wrapped close in self-sufficiency, and from that self-sufficiency appearing more firm and upright. It remained to be seen whether the frost of earth's temptations would destroy its promise altogether, or whether it would receive that more noble life within which only grace can impart. It remained to be seen whether the green sheath would open, that Heaven's light might reach down even into the heart, drawing out sweetness, colour, and beauty, while revealing weakness and humbling pride; showing the aspiring one that Heaven is a great deal higher, and Truth far more lofty, than she had deemed them to be while she remained in the self-sufficiency which owes its strength to ignorance alone.





CHAPTER IV.

A SCOTCH MIST.

CONVERSATION flowed in various channels during the remainder of the repast, especially in that of poetry, of which both the girls were fond. The mind of Claudia was more thoughtful and acute than that of her companion, and her reading had been far more varied and extensive ; but Emma chanced to possess Mrs. Hemans' poems, with which her companion was not acquainted, and this enabled the vicar's daughter to contribute her share to the literary conversation. Emma's memory was good, she knew many of the sweet poetess's verses by heart, and she was delighted to find an eager listener in Claudia. It gratified Emma not a little to find herself able to impart information and give pleasure to one whose mental powers had been so much more cultivated than her own. Emma began to hope that, should her intimacy with Claudia become closer, she might in time be able to take a part in delightful little meetings of

literary people of which her companion had given her a glowing account. A new ambition was raised in the bosom of the quiet young girl, whose sphere had been hitherto so much confined to nursery and school-room. Claudia offered the use of her father's library to her new friend; and Emma Holder, in hope, was half a blue-stocking already.

"I daresay that you are a poetess yourself," said Claudia gaily, as the girls sauntered back to the drawing-room after the meal was concluded. "I am sure, from your way of repeating poetry, that you must have written some verses. Confess the truth now, Emma—guilty, or not guilty?"

Emma laughed, and blushed, conscious that an "Ode to the Robin" lay in her blotting-book at home. Being, however, shy and diffident of her own powers, she only replied timidly, "One may be fond of poetry without having talent to compose it."

"Evasion of the question!" laughed Claudia; "come, come—there must be no sham modesty, nor any other kind of sham between you and me."

"I have written a very little," replied Emma; "I daresay that you have written a great deal. I wish that you would let me see some of your verses."

"Would you really?" cried Claudia, nothing

loath to produce them. "I might just show you my epigrams; no one has seen them yet but papa, and he thought them rather amusing. But do you like epigrams?" she inquired.

Emma, if the truth must be told, had no distinct idea of what an epigram might be; she would have thought that it was something like an epitaph, but for the word which Mr. Hartswood had applied to those of his daughter. But Emma was very anxious not to fall back from the position which she felt that she was gaining in Claudia's estimation; boldly to confess ignorance in the presence of one who sets a high value on intellect, requires a good deal of moral courage. Emma answered "Yes" to the question whether she liked epigrams, in hopes that she would find that she did so, as she was fond of everything amusing. As Emma repeated her request to see her friend's writings, Claudia, smiling, left the room, to fetch, as she said, her wee book.

"What a delightful place this is!" cried Emma, when she was left for two minutes alone; "I hope to pass many happy hours here with a friend whose society is so charming—so improving—so different from that of a set of troublesome boys!" Emma glanced around at inlaid tables and gilded shelves, supporting ornaments of china, ormolu, and crystal—graceful specimens of art, which would have seemed

out of place in Mr. Holder's homely parlour. Emma contrasted the elegance and refinement of Claudia's abode, the calm repose and intellectual enjoyments of Claudia's life with her own very different lot. Even Emma's gentle spirit might have experienced a slight emotion of envy, had she not hoped through her friendship with Claudia to share her coveted pleasures.

"Tommy and Harry must manage sometimes to do their lessons by themselves," thought the vicar's daughter; "they will value me more when they miss me; what a comfort it is to be rid of their noise! The stillness here is so refreshing, after all the shouting, bawling, hammering, clatter of heavy boots on the stairs, which my poor ears have had to endure. How my time has been wasted in drudgery, —my powers have never had fair play. I have been brought up under great disadvantages, but I shall now try to make up for lost time."

Whether that time had really been lost, which had been employed in assisting a busy mother, and helping on her brothers' education, may well admit of a doubt; it is possible that what Emma regarded as simple drudgery had been quite as useful an exercise for her mental powers as even the perusal of Mrs. Hemans' beautiful poems.

"I like Emma Holder," said Claudia to herself,

as she went up-stairs for her manuscript; "there is no flattery or nonsense about her. What a much more sensible and useful life she has led than the fine school-misses whom I used to meet in London; she has evidently a fine poetical taste, combined with solidity and sense! I dare look at her reflection in my magic mirror, without a fear of detecting round it a gathering mist of deceit."

Claudia soon returned to the drawing-room with a small green book in her hand. She drew a chair close to that on which Emma was seated, and sat down, with a sense of keen enjoyment, to read her verses to her new friend.

"You say that you like epigrams," she observed, as she opened her book. "I have made a few upon Scotch words; you told me that your mother is Scotch, so of course you know something of that language."

Emma's knowledge was confined to about half-a-dozen words; but she did not like to say so. Her companion seemed to take it so completely for granted that the daughter of a Scotch lady could not be ignorant of Scotch, that to have owned that she was so, would have appeared to Emma like a confession of utter stupidity.

"Here is my first epigram," said Claudia

Which for poetic *fire* most credit earns,
The Scandinavian *Scalds* * or Scottish Burns ? †

Emma knew that Burns was the name of a Scotch poet, but she had not a notion what he had to do with either *scalds* or Scandinavia. She became uncomfortably aware that an epigram is altogether unlike an epitaph ; rather resembling a riddle—and Emma could never make out the meaning of a riddle in her life. She was rather relieved to find that she was not expected to answer the question which she did not understand, as Claudia, without pause for comment, went on to the second epigram.

II.

In Scotland, *water* comes from *burn* ;
But *burn*, in England, comes from *fire*.

“ Papa said that the epigram ought to have been in rhyme,” observed Claudia ; “ so he altered it to this :—

From a spring flows the *burn* we in Scotland admire ;
But a *burn* in old England arises from *fire*.

“ Which way of expressing the idea do you think happiest ? ” inquired Claudia.

“ Your father, doubtless, knew best,” replied

* Ancient Scandinavian bards.

† Scotch for brook.

Emma, unwilling to own that in either form the idea was to her utterly incomprehensible.

“Ab! you like poetry; then perhaps this epigram may please you!” cried the young authoress, and she read aloud that one which she had taken most pains to polish.

III.

For hues of gold and purple never seek,
Where sunbeams on fair Scotia's mountains glint,
Nor look for rose on Scottish maiden's cheek;
If aught be lost in Scotia it is *tint*.*

Emma smiled the admiration which was—as she saw—expected, though her silent comment on the epigram was: “Why, surely the mountains are covered with heather and broom, purple and gold; and as for Scotch ladies being pale—mamma's cheeks are as red as an apple!”

“The next epigram you had better read to yourself,” observed Claudia, “for it is faulty if uttered aloud; it does for the eye, but not for the ear.”

IV.

In England this old proverb stands:
“If ifs and ans
Were pots and pans
There would be no work for tinkers' hands.”
In Scotland no such transformation begin,
For there the *ifs* would be changed into *gin*.†

* Scotch word for *lost*.

† *Gin*, Scotch for *gin*.

"What horrible nonsense these epigrams are!" thought Emma, a little indignant at what seemed to her an absurd calumny on the native land of her parent. "Had Claudia known anything at all about Scotland, she would have put whisky instead of gin. But that would have spoiled the rhyme." Yes, and the point of the epigram also; but Emma could see no point in it at all.

"There are only two more," said Claudia; "but they are papa's favourites."

V.

Greeting * with us a cheerful thing appears;
In Scotland *greeting* always comes with *tears*.

"That is very pretty, and curious, and funny," said the puzzled listener; but her mental comment on the epigram was: "I should like to see mamma's face if she heard that the Scotch people never meet without tears! She has never any patience for crying."

"Here's the last of my Scotch epigrams," said Claudia; "I have a few French ones, but I daresay that you will have heard enough for to-day."

"Much more than enough," thought Emma, but she faintly exclaimed, "Oh, no!"

VI.

In barbarous Scotland no woman should tarry;
The maidens are sure to be *spiered* † ere they marry.

* *Greeting*, Scotch for weeping.

† *Spiered*, Scotch for asked.

Emma could not refrain from a little exclamation of amazement on hearing an assertion so astounding. Her evident astonishment made Claudia say, with an inquiring look, "You have heard of *spiering* in Scotland, have you not, Emma?"

"Oh, dear, yes; they spear salmon there, but not women," was the reply; which made Claudia burst into a violent fit of laughter. She suddenly checked it, however, as a suspicion crossed her mind that Emma had understood as little of the meaning of the other epigrams as she evidently did of the last.

"Did you know the other Scotch words which I played upon?" inquired Claudia.

"Not exactly—not just all," faltered forth Emma, exceedingly afraid of being thought stupid on the one hand, or insincere on the other.

"The epigrams must have sounded like absolute nonsense if you did not know the words upon which they turned," said Claudia coldly, closing her manuscript book. "Why did you not tell me at once that you did not understand Scotch?"

Emma flushed and looked so uncomfortable, that Claudia said more playfully, in order to set her guest at her ease, "It is no part of a lady's education to learn the meaning of *spier*, *greet*, or *tint*: ignorance may not be 'bliss,' but it certainly is no disgrace

But even 'where one may be expected to be well informed," she added gravely, "it is always the best way to own ignorance frankly. It was only yesterday that papa told me an anecdote of President Lincoln which seems just to the point. This famous President of the United States had one day been speaking with great earnestness on some subject which interested him. A clergyman who was present, turning to an English orator who chanced to be near, made a quotation in Latin regarding Mr. Lincoln. Most men in the lofty station which the President held, and before an accomplished stranger, would have avoided showing ignorance of Latin, which every well-educated gentleman is supposed to have at his finger-ends. But honest Abraham Lincoln, leaning forward in his chair, looked inquiringly from the one to the other gentleman, and then frankly said with a smile, 'Which, I suppose, you are both aware I don't understand.'—It was so characteristic of the man!"

Emma smiled at the little anecdote, with some mortification at her heart. Whether or not intended as a rebuke, the story of Lincoln's frank simplicity seemed to be such to Emma. To her, Claudia Hartswood appeared a little exacting, carrying on her crusade against King Sham with an uncompromising zeal, which must leave her with few, if any, followers.

When the girls separated about an hour afterwards, though Emma carried away with her several books lent from the Hartswood library, and said with sincerity that she had much enjoyed her visit, she felt that she had lost ground in the favour of Claudia, and was more likely to find in her a pleasant acquaintance than an attached and intimate friend.





CHAPTER V.

THE STRANGER.

“**D**O I expect, do I require too much?” thought Claudia, as on the following morning, after as usual accompanying her father to the station, she sauntered alone into the thick shrubbery at the rear of Friern Hatch. “Am I seeking for that which I never can meet with, a thoroughly trustworthy friend, a girl without lip-deceit or look-deceit, because there is no heart-deceit within? Does King Sham then reign with such undisputed sway over all the civilized world, that neither in town nor country can I enlist one of my own sex to join me in making a firm stand against him? Even if it be so, I will hold fast my integrity of principle: I will strictly keep to truth: I will not stoop to deceit in any of its forms, though I should be regarded as a fool or a fanatic, and have to hold my ground alone!” And Claudia paused on the narrow path between bordering lilacs which she had been slowly traversing and

looked proudly upwards, pressing her foot more firmly on the gravel, and drawing herself up to her full height, as if defying an enemy unseen. The young green shoot was aspiring upwards, and hoping to reach the star! Claudia, full of zeal for truth, was yet a stranger to the Truth; her energy sprang from the root of pride; and with all her rigid scrutiny of the character of others, she was yet in ignorance of her own.

Claudia wandered on till she had almost reached the limits of the pleasure-grounds belonging to Friern Hatch. As has been previously mentioned, the dwelling stood on high ground, commanding a wide prospect. The downward slope behind the house was at first gradual, but then there was a sudden dip into a little wooded dell of no great extent but of singular beauty, at the bottom of which flowed a tiny brook, forming a crystal shrine to the bright green mosses over which it gurgled. A narrow path through the thick shrubbery led down to this brook, close to which was a small rural bower, formed of rough-hewn boughs intertwined, and so overgrown and matted with creepers, that at a short distance it could scarcely be distinguished from the foliage amidst which it nestled. The spot was profoundly quiet, and was a favourite haunt of Claudia, who called it her "bower of roses by Bendamere's

stream," and made it her retreat for study. The lane which divided the pleasure-grounds from the dead wall which enclosed the convent garden was certainly near, but could not be seen on account of the thickness of the intervening shrubs, and it was a lane along whose grass-grown ruts not so much as a cart seemed ever to travel. The only sounds which occasionally betrayed that human beings were not far remote, were the faint tinkle of the convent bell, or the music from its little Gothic chapel; but these, to Claudia's fancy, rather blended with than broke the peaceful stillness which pervaded this favourite spot. Claudia had never hitherto found the solitude of her bower invaded by any stranger, and was therefore not a little surprised when, on entering it on this occasion, a lady clad in the black garments of a nun suddenly started up from the seat, as if frightened by her unexpected appearance.

"Oh! forgive me!" exclaimed the stranger, shrinking back timidly on being detected in an act of intrusion.

The appearance of the young nun, as far as the dim light which struggled into the bower showed it, was singularly interesting. Her eyes were large and soft, her features delicate, and the linen band which crossed her forehead was scarcely whiter than the skin upon which it rested.

Claudia felt perplexed as to how she should greet so unexpected a guest. "How came you here?" escaped her lips; and then she wished the uncourteous words unspoken, though they had been uttered in a scarcely audible tone. Perhaps the stranger had mistaken their meaning, for she answered the "how" as if it had been the "why."

"I ventured to seek this spot as one where I might find solitude; where, unwatched and unproved, I might meditate, pray, and weep!" The graceful head drooped as the nun spoke, the form of Claudia standing in the doorway so obscured the feeble light that she could not see the face of the nun sufficiently distinctly to mark its expression, but she caught the sound of a shivering sigh.

"To weep! then you are unhappy?" said Claudia, in a gentle, sympathizing tone.

The stranger sank down on the rustic seat from which she had risen, but made no reply to the question.

"I thought," observed Claudia, "that nuns usually spoke of their lives with an air of serene contentment, at least to strangers who visit their convent."

"Content! yes, yes, *they* may be content who can believe that heavenly happiness can be purchased by the sacrifice of all earthly; that voluntary

imprisonment and self-inflicted hardships give a title to future glory," murmured the stranger, her hands unconsciously toying with the rosary of black beads which she wore suspended to her waist.

"Do you not believe that?" cried Claudia eagerly.

"Perhaps I did once, but now—now—I know not what to believe," faltered the nun.

Keen interest and curiosity were awakened in the bosom of Claudia. Here, indeed, was an unexpected and welcome break in the monotony of her lonely life—here was something to stir up her spirit of romance.

"I scarcely know whether I ought to converse with you," she said, with a little hesitation, still standing in the doorway, and leaning against its clematis-covered arch; "for my father has forbidden me to hold any intercourse with the ladies of the convent."

"Perhaps your father fears that you might be drawn into what he deems error," said the nun, sadly; "but I, alas! can lead no one—I myself need a guide."

"Are you not a Romanist?" asked Claudia, quickly.

"I thought so once; now all is a mist—a blank—I can see no path clear before me," replied the stranger, covering her face with her hands.

"But you are feeling for truth?" cried Claudia, entering the bower, and seating herself by the side of her singular guest.

"I have longed—oh, how I have longed!—for some one to whom I could tell my difficulties—some friend whom I could trust, and to whom I could open my heart," sighed the stranger.

Claudia drew closer to her side, "Tell me your name," she said, softly.

"In the convent I am known as Sister Helena. What my real name is matters not; she who bore it died—passed from life and from all that life can give—when she took the black veil of a nun."

The heart of Claudia beat high. Was she to become the friend and confidante of a poor misguided girl, who had been deluded into taking a step which she evidently now regretted? Often had Claudia's thoughts wandered towards the neighbouring convent; often had she desired to penetrate into the secret of the life led by its inmates, and her will had rebelled against the prohibition of her father. Now chance seemed likely to give her such an insight into the working of the nunnery system as she was not likely to have gained from a hundred visits to the building.

"You may speak freely to me," said the lawyer's daughter, with a proud consciousness that she was

incapable of betraying a trust; "no one ever had reason to regret placing confidence in my honour. Young as I am, it is possible that I may throw some light on your difficulties. I have read a good deal, and thought a good deal more, and I have often talked with my father about the difference between the Romish faith and our own."

A dark heavy cloud had been gradually overspreading the sky, blotting out the last glimpse of blue, and rendering the green twilight of the shady bower yet more dim than before, so that Claudia could now scarcely distinguish the features of her companion. There was a low rumble of distant thunder, and then the sudden rushing sound of a heavy fall of rain. The drops pattered fast and thick on the leaves, and splashed into the tiny brook which glided rapidly on, looking almost black under the shadow of the overhanging foliage. To the mind of Claudia in after-days how often recurred that scene—the brooding cloud, the sudden rain, and the low muttering thunder, while from beneath the folds of the dark shrouding veil came the soft mournful tones of Sister Helena!



CHAPTER VI.

SISTER HELENA'S TALE.

I AM of gentle birth," began Sister Helena, perhaps all the more encouraged to speak by the darkness which had come over the place, and the sound of rain which broke that stillness of nature which a few minutes before had been almost oppressive. "I am a member of a family that has always been strictly Catholic, and have been brought up to regard my Church as the only true Church upon earth, and her priests as infallible guides." The nun paused for several moments, sighed deeply, and then went on.

"I lost both my parents when I was little more than an infant, and the care of my education then devolved on an aunt, who is completely under the influence of her confessor. I was early destined to enter a convent. From time immemorial, in every generation of my family, one or more of the ladies had taken the veil. While I was yet a young girl in the schoolroom, it was discovered that I had a

decided vocation ; I was spoken of as the little nun. The idea of entering a convent was constantly presented to my mind, and made as attractive as might be. A nunnery was represented to a timid conscientious girl as the very vestibule of heaven, the abode of peace and love ; and its inmates as angels in human form, untainted by human infirmity."

"But why should your aunt wish to imprison you in a convent?" asked Claudia.

"I doubt not that she thought that the sacrifice of my freedom would be good for my soul—perhaps for her own," replied Helena. "Besides," she added, dropping her voice, so that Claudia could scarcely catch the sound of her words, "in thinking over the subject since I have taken the veil, I have become persuaded that there were other—family—pecuniary reasons for wishing me out of the way."

"Infamous!" exclaimed Claudia with indignation. She regarded the conduct of Helena's relatives, coaxing her into a convent in order to get possession of her money, much in the same light as she would have done that of the family of a Hindoo widow urging on her the fearful sacrifice of a suttee.

"Be that as it may," continued Helena, "a convent life seemed to me in my early youth as my inevitable destiny, and I was disposed submissively

to accept a fate which I scarcely knew how to avoid. I was at least uncomplaining, if I could not be cheerful; and if a desire would sometimes arise to know a little more of the world before I should quit it for ever, I regarded the thought as a temptation, and confessed it to the priest as a sin."

"It was a most natural desire!" cried Claudia, becoming more and more interested in the story of the stranger, whose cruel position, from the power of her own imagination, she vividly realized.

"The time for my entering on my novitiate had almost arrived," said Sister Helena, "when an incident occurred which, though not followed by the serious consequences at first apprehended, was not to be without its effect on—perhaps all the rest of my life. I was crossing the road in Hyde Park, returning from a walk in which I had been accompanied only by a servant, when I was struck down by a carriage, of which the horses had suddenly taken fright, and was raised from the ground insensible, and with my left arm broken. I was instantly carried to the hospital near, and I remained there for several days before I was removed by my friends, my aunt being an invalid at the time, and having no vocation for nursing."

"You would have the advantage of having good medical skill at the hospital," observed Claudia.

"I had more ; I had most tender nursing," said the nun, "and that not only from hired attendants. The part of the hospital to which I had been taken was visited by a lady—a Protestant lady—who came, like a guardian angel, to comfort and bless the afflicted. I had been strongly prejudiced, I own, against those whom I had been taught to regard as heretics ; I had heard the worldliness and heartlessness of Protestant ladies contrasted with the piety and self-denial of our sisters of charity, so that it was a new and strange thing to me to discover that your Church holds women as ready to give themselves up to labours of love as our own."

"And that wearing a peculiar dress is no necessary part of such labours," observed Claudia, "nor the fetters of vows."

"My heart became much drawn towards Miss Irvine—such was the name of the lady-visitor"—continued Sister Helena. "There was to me an inexpressible charm about her voice and her manner, which gave force to her words. Even her step was to me like music, as she glided from one patient to another, with tender compassion for each, though her pity seemed more especially to rest upon me."

"And Miss Irvine opened your eyes to truth?" asked Claudia, eagerly.

"She had scarcely time to open my eyes to any

truth, save that she herself was all kindness and goodness," said Helena, softly. "Perhaps my friends were alarmed at my having any communication with a Protestant lady, for I was soon removed from the hospital, and had a Catholic nurse. I never saw my visiting angel again, but I carried her image in my heart."

"I wonder that the discovery of the possibility of your Romanist friends being mistaken in at least some of their views did not prevent your taking such a step as that of entering a convent," said Claudia.

"Oh, I was weak in body and in spirit," murmured Helena; "I was scarcely able to exercise a will of my own, at least not to oppose it to the wishes and persuasions of my natural guardian and her confessor. As soon as it was prudent for me to encounter the fatigue of a short journey from London, I was removed to this convent, and entered on my novitiate here. I was treated with great kindness at that time. The state of my health afforded an excuse for many a little indulgence. I was never roused from sleep to attend night-services in the chapel, even fast-day rules were relaxed in my favour. All was done to make convent-life appear to the novice in the most advantageous light, and in my state of nervous weakness the repose which

it offered was refreshing and soothing. I felt scarcely either sorry or glad when the time arrived for my taking the irrevocable step which should bind me to the convent for ever."

"Did you never hear from Miss Irvine?" asked Claudia.

"Never," replied Helena sadly. "If letters ever came from the Protestant lady they never reached me, all correspondence having to pass through the hands of the Lady Superior. Miss Irvine knew where I was likely to be found, and may have written,—I have since had reason to believe that she did so; but, be that as it may, often as I thought of her, I had then no cause to suppose that my Protestant friend remembered me, till a few days after I had sealed my fate by taking the veil."

"And then what happened?" asked Claudia with interest, as the stranger paused in her narration. The rain was pattering through the leaves with more violence than before, and the streamlet, brown and swollen, was racing more swiftly along.

"I was one day walking alone in the convent garden," replied Sister Helena, "telling my beads as I slowly pursued my way. There was an aged man at work, planting out in the border a few spring flowers, which is the one luxury with us regarded as lawful, and the old gardener is the person

of the other sex of whose services we make use. The man raised himself from his stooping posture as I approached the spot where he was working; I fancied that he was watching my movements, and I went towards him as though I had known by intuition that he had a message for me. Just as I passed him the gardener, without uttering a word, drew a parcel from the pocket of his jacket, and placed it in my hand. Curious, I confess, to see the contents of the mysterious packet, I hid it in the folds of my veil, and went on at the same measured pace, longing to escape back to my cell to examine what I had received, and yet afraid to awake suspicion by any unguarded movement, should one of the sisterhood chance to observe me."

"How that wretched system of restraint necessarily leads to deceit!" exclaimed Claudia, whose spirit revolted from anything that bore the appearance of secret intrigue, as a free bird would abhor the underground life of a mole.

"As soon as I was alone in my own little cell," continued Sister Helena, "I hastened to open my packet. I was a little startled to find that it contained the 'Life of Luther,'—a work which I own that I had some curiosity to read, yet one of which the perusal would, I well knew, be regarded not only

as a grievous breach of convent rules, but as a serious offence against the Catholic Church."

"I suppose that it was Miss Irvine who sent the book," observed Claudia.

"I did not—I could not doubt that she was the donor," said Sister Helena. "The initials *M. I.* were on the fly-leaf. I had a little struggle in my mind as to whether I should read the forbidden book, or hand it over to the Lady Superior."

"I have no doubt in which way the struggle ended," said Claudia with a smile.

"I opened the volume," continued the nun, "I began to peruse the contents with an eagerness which increased as I read. A new world seemed to be opening before me."

"Naturally it would be so," observed Miss Hartswood, "as the scales of error were doubtless beginning to fall from your eyes. When you had finished the book were you not convinced that the brave and noble Reformer who attacked superstition and deceit with an open Bible as his weapon, had justice and truth on his side?"

"I never finished reading the book," replied Helena; "I had not the opportunity of doing so. I was not half-way through the contents of the volume when, as after vespers I sat reading in my cell by the light of a taper, I was surprised by a

visit from the Lady Superior herself. I had not time to conceal my volume effectually, though I made an attempt to cover it with my Breviary. The Superior instantly perceived the suspicious book, and to my great terror and confusion I beheld the 'Life of Luther' in her grasp."

"How did the old lady look on discovering such a work in the possession of one of her nuns?" inquired Claudia, with no small curiosity.

"Much as she might have looked had she found one of them fastening a viper in her bosom," answered Helena. "Her glance of indignation, her exclamation of horror, I never can forget. The book, I scarcely need add, was speedily removed from my cell, and I never saw it again: it was probably burned."

"As so many of those who hold the same faith as Luther have been!" interrupted the indignant young hearer.

"But I had bitter cause to remember that the book had been in my possession," continued the nun. "There was no more indulgence for my bodily weakness, no more care for my comfort. I was regarded as a black sheep in the flock, as a wretch infected with the plague of heresy. A grievous penance was appointed to atone for the crime of having glanced into the 'Life of Luther.' I had to endure weary

days of fasting, and to spend nights on my knees before the altar, reciting the penitential psalms."

"What tyranny! what injustice!" exclaimed Claudia Hartswood; "but you shall suffer such oppression no longer. You have made your escape, taken refuge in our grounds, and there you are safe from the power of priest or Lady Superior. My father, Mr. Hartswood, is a lawyer, one of the noblest in his profession,—he never was known to make a mistake, or do a mean or ungenerous thing. My father will take up your case; he will protect an orphan, a persecuted woman, and expose to the light of day all the injustice of which she has been the victim."

Helena shrank back as if almost alarmed by the enthusiasm of her young champion.

"Oh! no, no!" she faltered; "there must be no violent measures taken. I cannot, dare not, break away thus suddenly from all the ties that bind me, to throw myself upon the mercy of strangers—strangers of a different religion from my own."

"I thought that your faith in the Romanist religion was shaken," said Claudia, with a little less vehemence in her manner.

"Shaken—perhaps so—but not destroyed. I know not enough of any other religion to give up that in which I have from my childhood been nur-

tured;" and Helena, as she spoke, passed the beads of her rosary through her fingers, as if performing the act of prayer.

"You need more instruction," said Claudia; "but that can be easily given. I will lend you books, I will—"

"Oh! I dare not take another heretical book into my cell!" interrupted Helena; "I know too well, by terrible experience, the penalty which I should incur!"

"What would you yourself suggest?" inquired Claudia, whose desire to help the persecuted nun was only strengthened by foreseeing that difficulties must lie in the way.

"Can you not come yourself to this quiet spot—bringing books if you will—that I may have intercourse with one human being who can sympathize with my trials, and give me some knowledge of a religion of which I as yet know so little?" said Helena, with some nervous hesitation.

"That, on my part, is easily done," replied Claudia; "but surely watched and walled in as you are, it would be difficult for you to keep tryst. I know not how you contrived to make your way here, the convent wall is so high."

"It is pierced by a secret door, supposed to be known only to the Lady Superior," said Helena,

lowering her voice to a whisper. "It was by happy accident that I discovered this way of escape. This is an hour when the garden is usually empty, and the sisters engaged in occupations in which I am not expected to join. I could on most days contrive to steal hither unnoticed, as I have done this morning."

"I shall be rejoiced to meet you in my bower, and to do all that I can to answer your doubts, and show you on what ground Protestants build their opinions," said Claudia, delighted at the prospect of becoming instructress, confidante, and friend of this most interesting stranger. "I will consult my father, as soon as he returns from his business in London."

"Oh, your father must know nothing of our meeting; you must not breathe a syllable about me to him," exclaimed Sister Helena, grasping the arm of Claudia, in alarm.

"And why not?" asked Claudia abruptly. "I never hide anything from my father;—there is not the shadow of a secret between us, all is as open as daylight. You need not fear my father," she continued more gently; "he is as incapable of betraying your confidence as I am myself, and he is far better able to help you. Nor, though he is a stanch Protestant, will he be prejudiced against you because you are a Romanist. Still, papa's business brings

him into close intercourse with persons of various persuasions. His principal client is a Romanist ; he keeps her most valuable papers, knows her most private affairs, is perpetually consulted by her upon all kinds of subjects,—except, of course, those connected with her religion. Scarcely ever do three days pass without a letter coming for papa in the handwriting of Lady Melton.”

“And it is just because Lady Melton thus places entire confidence in Mr. Hartswood, that it is impossible that I should do so,” observed the young nun. “One word will explain the whole difficulty to you,—Lady Melton is my guardian and aunt.”

Claudia gave a little start of surprise.

“I put it to your own sense of what is delicate and right,” continued Sister Helena : “could your father act as a lady’s most confidential adviser, could he receive from her remuneration for professional service, and at the same time be secretly aiding her nearest relative to acquire knowledge, and perhaps—perhaps take steps of which she would most entirely disapprove?”

“Impossible !” exclaimed Claudia Hartswood ; “my father, who is the soul of honour, would not act a part so double, so base, for any consideration in the world !”

“Then it must be evident to you,” resumed the

nun, "that Mr. Hartswood should know nothing of my situation at the convent, that he should be ignorant of all that concerns my unhappy fate; he would otherwise be necessarily placed in a false, and painful position."

"It scarcely even seems right that his daughter should be intrusted with such secrets," said Claudia, with a grave, perplexed look. "Of course, I have nothing to do with my father's client, or her law business, and yet—"

"You confirm the doubt which has painfully rested on my own mind," said Sister Helena, heaving a sigh of deep disappointment; "I should by secret intercourse only involve you in trouble. I should throw the shadow of my griefs over your sunshiny path. No, no; it is better, far better, that you should forget that we ever have met. I can bear—or sink under—my trials alone!" And the fair stranger rose, as if to leave the bower at once, and go forth into the fast-pouring rain.

"Stay, Helena, stay; I can never desert you, never fail one who has sought my sympathy, and offered me her confidence," exclaimed Claudia, laying her hand on the white slender fingers of Helena, and making her resume her seat on the rustic bench. "You have no friend, no adviser within reach, but myself. I cannot bind myself down by any cold

fetters of prudence or etiquette," she continued, with kindling enthusiasm ; " what my father cannot do I can. You may trust me, Helena, you may trust me. I may not be able to free you, I may not be able to convince you ; but I will at least feel for your trials, and help you as far as I can."

As her only reply, Helena sank her drooping head on the shoulder of her young friend. Claudia drew her to her heart, with the same impulse of protecting compassion as that with which she would have sheltered from the swoop of a hawk a trembling bird that had flown for refuge to her bosom.

"Be comforted, my Helena, my poor, desolate, oppressed one," she murmured. "I will return here to-morrow at this hour, and you will join me if you are able to elude the watchfulness of your persecutors. I will in the meantime ransack our library for such books as may throw light on the differences between Popish and Protestant doctrines. I will bring them hither, and we will quietly and secretly search after knowledge together."

"Oh ! that is all that I hope—all that I desire," cried Helena, raising her head with a smile of pleasure on her lips. "See, the rain has suddenly ceased, and a bright golden ray is flashing down from between the dark clouds. Even as that ray

is your tenderness, your mercy to a desolate heart, sweet young lady."

"You must call me Claudia," said her companion.

Helena softly repeated the name "Claudia," and raising the hand of her new friend, pressed it fervently to her lips. The touching grace with which the young nun performed this slight action made it more expressive than words.

"And now I must hasten away, or I may be missed," said Helena, again rising, and drawing her thick black veil more closely around her. "Do not attempt to follow me as I glide back to my prison—less of a prison now, as it does not shut out hope. Farewell; we shall soon meet again; I shall count the hours, till I find myself again at your side, Claudia, my protectress, my friend."


And almost before the last words had left her lips, the fair nun had glided away from the bower, shaking down, as she did so, a shower of glistening raindrops from the creepers that overhung the narrow doorway.





CHAPTER VII.

PROJECTS.

“ WONDER if this is all a strange dream !” exclaimed Claudia Hartswood aloud, after the dark veiled form had vanished from her sight behind the shrubbery. “It seems more like a dream than a reality ; and if Sister Helena had not left the print of her small feet yonder on the wet gravel, I should be tempted to fancy that my nun was but the creation of my own imagination. She is lovely enough and interesting enough to be the subject of a poet’s dream. Not an hour ago I was regretting that I had not found in the whole world a girl of whom I could make a friend, and now a friend drops down upon me, I could almost say, from the clouds ! How strange and novel is the position in which I am suddenly placed ! Full, unreserved confidence placed in my honour by one who is desolate, wronged, deceived ; one whose worst enemies are her own kindred ; one who has been cruelly sacrificed by her who was her

natural protector!" All the chivalrous spirit of Claudia was up in arms against the cupidity and heartlessness of Lady Melton, and the tyranny of the Lady Superior. Her cheeks glowed, her eyes sparkled with indignation, as with a rapid step she mounted the steep upward path towards the house, brushing carelessly past the wet shrubs that bordered and encroached on the way. "What will happen next?" reflected Claudia. "I will prove myself worthy of Helena's trust; I will exert all the powers of my mind to help her in her search after truth. How glad I am that my father has taught me to cultivate my intellect; that I have not frittered away my time in mere skimming over the surface of knowledge, or in acquiring showy accomplishments like school-girls whom I have known! I remember,"—Claudia had slackened her steps, and now stood still, absorbed in reflection—"I remember what the wife of Marshal Ancre said of the influence of a strong mind over a weak one. I should judge from her own account that Helena has neither a powerful mind nor a very strong will; she is a gentle, clinging, affectionate girl, who has allowed herself to be guided even against her better judgment. But a character of this kind will at least be open to conviction; she will be simple and sincere in trying to acquire religious knowledge. And

when Helena's eyes are fully opened, what will follow then?" Claudia pressed her forehead with her hand, and then replied to her own question: "She will doubtless fly from the convent, and I will aid her in making her escape. She will seek the protection of the laws of our free land; every heart that values liberty of conscience will sympathize with the young nun. An account of all that has happened will be written, published, eagerly read—perhaps mine will be the pen that shall write it." An involuntary smile flitted across the features of the lawyer's young daughter at the idea. Claudia had for years cherished the ambition of becoming an authoress; she had written other things besides epigrams. She had lately commenced a tale founded on the touching history of the martyred Anna van Hove. But how much more likely to awaken public interest, and to raise its authoress to the fame for which she panted, would be a story of modern life, an account of the wrongs, the conversion, the escape of a beauteous young nun, still living to confirm the truth of the tale of which she would be the heroine! What a powerful effect such a work might have even in arresting Romanist aggression, in exposing the evils of convent life! Animated by thoughts such as these, Claudia resumed her rapid walk, gained the highest part of the grounds, and

then turning round, paused and gazed down on the picturesque Gothic building below, which had hitherto been to her an object of curiosity and interest, which were now deepening into intensity. The young enthusiast stretched forth her hand towards the convent, from which the tinkle of a bell was now heard, and her emotions found vent in low-muttered words :—

“May it not be that a pen in this weak girlish hand may prove more powerful to overthrow yon abode of superstition than platform oration or pulpit eloquence? May it not be that I who hate falsehood may be the chosen instrument to expose falsehood in its most alluring disguise?” The eyes of Claudia dilated, her form seemed to rise in height; in imagination she was a successor of Luther, rending the veil from fanaticism and bigotry, letting in light on the haunts where superstition still lurked as in the dark ages.

“I only wish that I could consult my father,” thought Claudia—“he who is so talented and wise, and so true a Protestant besides. Would that he had had any one in all broad England for his client rather than this cruel Lady Melton! I feel uneasy at carrying on any project that must be kept secret from him; it seems almost like entering upon a course of deceit.” Claudia’s countenance lost all its

brightness of expression, and her brow contracted into a furrow, as she pursued her train of thought, with her eyes still fixed on the convent, the chimneys of which were almost on the same level as the ground upon which she was standing. "My father strictly charged me to have no intercourse whatever with the nuns. He trusted in my honour for implicit obedience; and I have not only been holding a long private conversation with one of the inmates of the convent, but it seems more than likely that I may become her most intimate friend. Can I be doing what is wrong?"

The question was one of importance. A serious doubt as to the propriety of her own conduct had started up in the mind of Claudia; but the lawyer's daughter had a ready argument with which to repel it. "Papa forbade me to speak with the convent ladies lest they should pervert my faith; but that danger does not exist in my intercourse with Helena; on the contrary, it is I who am likely to convert this poor misguided young creature. I must keep to the spirit rather than to the letter of my father's commands. He did not foresee such a case as this. Papa will rejoice as much as myself if, through my means, this interesting girl embraces the Protestant faith. When papa knows all, he will not blame me for having acted according to reason, to conscience,

to duty, even though I have been obliged to work more secretly than is agreeable to my natural disposition."

How unconsciously was Claudia Hartswood suffering herself to be drawn into one of the most perilous of Jesuitical errors, the belief that *the end justifies the means*; or, in the language of the poet, that we may, "to do a great right, do a little wrong." Confident in her own acuteness of intellect, and in what she deemed her uprightness of purpose, Claudia was persuading herself that disobedience and cunning were not to be blamed if they appeared needful to carry on a work of conversion. And this was the same Claudia who, on the previous day, had so fearlessly affirmed that there was no deceit in her heart any more than in her looks or on her lips! Could she at that moment have glanced into her magic testing mirror, would she have seen no mist gathering round her own reflection?

"There can be no harm in what I am doing!" said Claudia to herself many times during the course of that day, when pursuing with an abstracted mind her usual avocations, or when collecting volumes from the bookcase bearing on the subject of Protestant controversy with Rome. When we take much pains to assure our consciences that there is no harm in some action which we have set our hearts on

doing, it behoves us to examine closely indeed whether the track of the serpent may not be traced on our path. The dislike with which human pride regards the inspired description of the heart as being above all things deceitful, renders not that description less true, even with those who are high-minded and generous, and in their usual conduct frank and open, as was Mr. Hartswood's young daughter.





CHAPTER VIII.

MENTAL SENSES.

“**I** AM afraid, my girl, that you have spent but a dull day in your solitude here.” Such was the greeting of Mr. Hartswood, as Claudia met him outside the gate of the shrubbery, and slipped her arm within his, proud and happy to be his companion on his brisk homeward walk.

“It has been a very wet day, papa,” was Claudia’s rather evasive reply. “I suppose that you also have had heavy showers in London.”

“Shut up in court, as I was all day, one knows little and cares less about weather. We had storms enough within doors to make us forget storms without, a kind of pelting that does not wet the clothes, though it may damp the spirits and damage the temper,” laughed the lawyer, whose temper and spirits also were evidently in first-rate condition. As Mr. Hartswood took his usual turn in the grounds before proceeding to the house, he gave his daughter

a lively and graphic account of a turbulent scene in the law-court. Mr. Hartswood was wont to return to Friern Hatch in buoyant spirits, thoroughly enjoying the relaxation afforded by country air and quiet, and the unbracing of his mind in the society of his bright, intelligent daughter. Claudia almost forgot her nun till she and her father went into the house and entered the lawyer's study, and the sight of a note which lay there on the green leather-covered table recalled Helena to her mind.

"Only one letter happily this evening," said Mr. Hartswood taking up the note.

"From Lady Melton, of course," observed Claudia, to whom by this time the handwriting of her father's client was very familiar.

"Yes," replied Mr. Hartswood, as his eye glanced rapidly over the contents of the note. "The good lady is in desperate haste for her suit to come on, and expects every one else to be as impatient as herself. But I've not all our ammunition ready yet, to say nothing of priming and loading. A case involving estates worth a couple of hundred thousand pounds is not to be entered upon without care and preparation. We must not open fire till we make sure that we have the right range, and that our battery will do its work effectually." There was, however, confidence of success expressed in the

tone of the lawyer's voice. Mr. Hartswood looked forward to the opening of the most important and curious case which he had ever been called upon to conduct, with the professional pleasure which a general might feel in commencing a campaign which he was assured would end in his triumph and success.

"I suppose that you have seen no one to-day?" asked Mr. Hartswood, still glancing over the note which he held in his hand.

"I have not seen Emma Holden," replied Claudia, again speaking a little evasively, with an uncomfortable consciousness that she was doing so, which made her glad that her father did not look at her as she answered his simple question. Claudia took up the envelope which had enclosed Lady Melton's note, Mr. Hartswood having tossed it down on the table. "I don't like this handwriting," she observed, "it looks prim, stiff, and sharp, like the writer."

"Where have you seen Lady Melton?" asked the lawyer.

"In my mind's eye," replied Claudia.

"Oh! its vision is rather imperfect," said Mr. Hartswood gaily, "or you would have seen that my client, instead of being prim, hard, and stiff, is a lively, animated little lady, who must have been

attractive in her youth, notwithstanding the mole on her cheek."

Mr. Hartswood seated himself on his easy-chair, which was, like the table, covered with green leather, stretched out his limbs, folded his arms, and leaned back, a picture of calm enjoyment, the active man resting in his own pleasant home after the fatigues of the day. The countenance of the lawyer expressed intelligence and shrewdness in a remarkable degree. Claudia was wont to apply to her father the description of the poet :—

" On his bold visage middle age
Had slightly stamped its signet sage,
But had not quenched the open truth
And fiery vehemence of youth."

The description was, however, rather an idealized one as applied to Mr. Hartswood, and would have been more appropriate ten years before. The lower part of the lawyer's reddish whiskers were now tinged with white, and here and there a silver line on the overhanging brows betrayed the advance of time; but the glance of the deep set eyes under those brows was keen and bright as ever, while wit and playful good-humour were expressed in the lines of the handsome mouth. Mr. Hartswood's figure had become slightly stout as he passed the meridian of life, but he was still an active and powerful man.

Very proud was Claudia of her father, he who was so full of energy and spirit, so fond of his profession, so eager for work, and yet able to unbend so thoroughly, enjoying now his laugh at a bon-mot or jest, now a metaphysical discussion with the young daughter whose mind he delighted to train, and who, in feature, talent, and disposition, a good deal resembled himself.

"What a singular expression that of 'mind's eye' is, papa," observed Claudia, as she drew a footstool near to her father, and seated herself at his feet.

"It is one of Shakspeare's bold figures of speech," said Mr. Hartswood,— "a fine thought poetically expressed."

"The eye seems especially suited for poetry," remarked Claudia; and she added laughingly, "not even Shakspeare would have ventured to write upon 'the mind's nose.'"

"I beg your pardon," replied her father with a smile. "The word 'nose' may not, indeed, be introduced but Shakspeare indubitably endows the mind with the sense of which the nose is the organ,—I mean, of course, that of smell."

"Papa!" exclaimed Claudia, "can you mean that?"

"There is a curious analogy, a kind of resemblance between the faculties of the mind and those

of the body to which it is united," continued Mr. Hartswood. "The mind has its five senses analogous to those which we term sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell. You who are so fond of puzzles, see if you can make out what the mental senses are."

"I will try, at least," said Claudia, as she rested her clasped hands on the knee of her parent and looked up in his face. "*Sight*, the mind's eye, that must be *imagination*, by which the mind sees what is otherwise unseen."

"And what is the mind's *ear*, or rather its sense of *hearing*?" inquired Mr. Hartswood.

"That is harder to find out," replied Claudia; "just give me a minute to think;" and she pressed her forehead with her hand.

"Were I to address you in Greek would you hear me?"

"Yes, with my ears, but I should not understand you. Ah, papa!" cried Claudia, "I see, or rather my mind *hears*, what you mean. *Comprehension* is the mind's sense of hearing; the outer ear takes in the sound, the inner ear the sense of what is spoken."

"And now we come to the mind's *palate*," said Mr. Hartswood in his playful way; "what can my little girl make out by that?"

"Food for the mind," murmured Claudia half

aloud ; " that is a very common expression ; and the mind, like the palate, finds one kind of food more to its taste than another. Does not the word *taste* express the mental as well as the bodily sense, dear papa ? "

" I should myself prefer the word *judgment*," replied Mr. Hartswood. " As the palate discriminates between sweet and bitter, good, bad, and indifferent, so the mind exercises its powers of *judgment* on any matter with which it may be brought into contact."

" How amusing and curious are these analogies, as you call them, papa ! " cried Claudia. " I should never have imagined, unless you had pointed it out, what a thought, or rather what a cluster of thoughts, might be put into one's brain by that single expression, ' mind's eye.' But there are yet two of the mental senses which I have not yet tried to make out. *Touch*," she continued, gently pressing her fingers on the hand of her father ; " what can be the mind's sense of *feeling* ? "

" An expression in very common use may help you to solve the problem," said the lawyer.

" Feeling one's way—not with the hand, but with the—let me think, let me think ! " murmured Claudia. " One watches a face to see if one may venture to utter what may give pain or offence ;

but then it seems as if that were the office of the bodily eyes."

"Many persons who have perfect bodily sight are incapable of that mental exercise which you have described as *feeling one's way*," observed Mr. Hartswood. "Such persons do not seem to be aware of the annoyance or pain which they cause, though they may defeat their own object by their total want of—"

"Of *discernment*, of *tact*," exclaimed Claudia. "Ah! have I not found it out now? *Discernment* is the mind's sense of *touch*."

"Such, at least, is my idea," said Mr. Hartswood, "and I think that it is confirmed by our common mode of parlance. We speak of *handling* a matter awkwardly; that is, without that delicate tact or discernment which enables its possessor to do the right thing in the right way, at the right time, and in the right place."

"Blundering people have their minds left-handed, as it were," cried Claudia gaily. "But oh, papa, the hardest riddle of all remains for the last! I cannot imagine what mental faculty can be called the mind's sense of *smell*, and you say that Shakespeare described it."

"With the mind I believe it to be the most important sense of all," said the lawyer.

Claudia looked up earnestly into the intelligent eyes of her father, as if to read his meaning in them. She was fairly puzzled at last.

"I have read most of Shakspeare's plays to you, Claudia," remarked Mr. Hartswood; "can you remember no expression in any one of them referring not to outward, but to inward power of distinguishing scent?"

"*'Oh, my offence is rank, it smells to Heaven!'*" exclaimed Claudia suddenly, quoting a well-known line from Hamlet.

"Much the same idea is expressed in a passage in King John," observed Mr. Hartswood, "where Faulconbridge, after the cruel death of poor Prince Arthur, is made to exclaim, '*For I am stifled with this smell of sin!*' To me that line is one of the most forcible ever written by the hand of our glorious poet."

"Then Shakspeare must have considered wickedness as a thing which to the mind has an evil scent, and goodness, I suppose, as a thing which has sweet fragrance," observed Claudia, thoughtfully. "But I do not just know what faculty of the mind can be said to distinguish between them."

"I should call it *moral perception*," replied Mr. Hartswood—"perhaps the noblest attribute of the human mind; certainly one to be ranked above

imagination, or even quickness of comprehension."

"Though, as regards bodily senses, that of smell is the one which we could most readily part with," said Claudia. "The pleasure derived from it is as nothing compared to that given through the eye or the ear."

"The most important use of the sense of smell to man is not to bestow pleasure," remarked Mr. Hartswood: "it is a valuable safeguard to health, and even to life; and in this point especially is there a striking analogy between it and our moral perceptions."

"I am sorry that I do not understand you, papa," said Claudia frankly

"The nostrils are offended by what is impure and unwholesome, by malaria, or the scent of corruption," observed Mr. Hartswood. "But for the warning which they give, we should often inhale what is deadly, without being aware of our danger. It is exactly thus with our *moral perceptions*: they give us warning of peril to the soul."

"Some people seem scarcely able to distinguish between right and wrong," remarked Claudia.

"It is sad when the moral perceptions are blunted, as is too often the case by frequent contact with evil," said the lawyer. "We meet with analogous

physical cases, where persons, crowded together in dwellings so unwholesome that to one accustomed to pure air the atmosphere within them is stifling, have become so accustomed to the evil as to feel no outward annoyance from the poisonous gases which are, not the less surely, bringing fever and death to their frames."

"A strange fancy has occurred to my mind," said Claudia. "When the gas escaped in the dining-room lately, we tried to overpower the horrid scent which it caused with *eau-de-Cologne*."

"Had a dozen bottles of perfume been expended," interrupted Mr. Hartswood; "they would not have prevented the atmosphere of the room being in so dangerous a state that the entrance of a person with a lighted candle would have caused the blowing up of the house."

"Yes; the perfume was to make the gas less disagreeable, not less dangerous," observed Claudia. "My thought was this: Is not my enemy, King Sham, a great patron of perfumes to make what is wrong appear right—to confuse what you call our *moral perceptions*?"

Mr. Hartswood laughed, and rubbed his hands gaily. He always encouraged his daughter to start what he considered an original idea. "King Sham is the very king of perfumers," cried the lawyer;

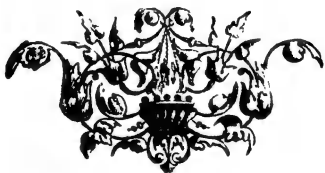
“ he takes the fragrant flowers of virtue, and distils, boils, squeezes, and pounds them up into a pomade of his own, ready for any occasion. Flattery, false courtesy, eye-service, are, as it were, perfumes drawn by him from dead reverence, dead kindness, dead obedience, and are used only to mislead and to cover over what would otherwise shock our moral perceptions.”

“ Ah, papa, you could never bear perfumes except from fresh flowers and fruit !” cried Claudia. “ How scornfully you tossed aside the musk-scented note which I received from Euphemia Long !”

“ As you disliked her rouge,” said the lawyer. “ The breeze needs no perfume, and the skin no tinting from art ; and so honesty and truth, sweet and pleasant to the moral perceptions, require not the colour of hypocrisy, or the musk-odour of deceit.”

The foregoing conversation may be regarded as a specimen of those which often were held between Mr. Hartswood and his daughter — conversations which would have been as tedious and fatiguing to Emma Holder, as they were usually delightful to Claudia. This one, however, left an uneasy sensation on the mind of the lawyer’s daughter, for which she could scarcely account. Was there, to speak metaphorically, some leak from the gas-pipe, or some

malaria from the marsh, of which her moral perceptions made her, though imperfectly, aware? Was the avowed enemy of deceit, in all its various forms, for once resorting to its means to persuade herself that the air held no subtle poison—that all around her was wholesome and pure?





CHAPTER IX.

OFF HER GUARD.

"**Y**ES, the sooner the strawberries are gathered the better ; I wonder that we have one left after yesterday's rain," said the vicar's rosy-cheeked wife, as she stood by the parlour window, fastening up with her own hands the white knitted curtain which testified to her own and her daughter's industry during long winter evenings.

"The north wall kept the rain off some of the strawberries ; there won't be any for preserving this year, but lots for eating," cried Harry. "You promised us a feast of strawberries and cream, mother ; and this is Emma's birth-day, you know."

"Ah, these birth-days," laughed the good-humoured lady, "they seem to come every other week in the year ! But I have not forgotten my promise, Emma, my dear," she continued, turning towards her daughter ; "this would be a good occasion for us to ask your new friend to join us. Just pop on your hat, and run over to Friern Hatch, and bring back

Claudia Hartswood. It may be a novelty to her to pick strawberries from the bed."

Emma started up eagerly—she needed no second bidding. "I'll put on my hat in a minute," she cried, as she rolled up the table-cloth which she had been darning; "I daresay that Claudia will be delighted to come."

"Don't you be stopping to spout poetry together," cried Tommy, "or you'll find more leaves than strawberries when you come back."

Though the attention of Claudia had been so much occupied with her interesting visitor from the convent that she had scarcely given a thought to Emma Holder, the mind of the vicar's daughter had often reverted to Claudia. The feeling of slight mortification which Emma had experienced on account of the unlucky epigrams was passing away; while the impression left by the intelligent countenance and frank cordial manner of Miss Hartswood was vivid and charming. Emma still luxuriated in the hope of delightful saunters with Claudia through the thick shrubberies, or yet more charming *tête-à-têtes* in library or bower; perhaps even invitations to Mr. Hartswood's select little dinner-parties, when literary friends should come down from London to make the social meal an intellectual feast.

"Claudia will forget my stupidity about these

foolish epigrams," thought Emma. "I will be more careful in future; nothing of lip-deceit or look-deceit shall she ever discover in me. I admire her straightforwardness and strong love of truth, though I own that I think that she carries them to an extent that is almost absurd."

The morning was breezy and bright; sun and wind together had dried up almost all trace of the yesterday's rain, save that the landscape looked fresher and greener for the heavy showers that had fallen. Gaily Emma pursued her uphill walk towards Friern Hatch, which, nestling in its shrubbery, crowned the highest point in the landscape.

On Emma's last visit to the place, Claudia had invited her young friend to come to her at any hour, and without any kind of ceremony.

"Do not ring the bell or raise the knocker," she had said; "the doors are always wide open in summer: you have nothing to do but walk in. I am almost as much alone here during the greater part of the day as Crusoe was in his island. Our fence is to me what the sea was to him; I never can say 'not at home.' You are sure to find me either in the library, or wandering about in the grounds; and come when you will, or how you will, you may always be certain of a welcome."

Remembering this frank invitation from one who

so carefully weighed every word that she uttered, Emma felt assured that her visit would give pleasure. The shy country girl was glad that there was no need to summon Garrard, the portly, solemn-looking butler, whose waiting at luncheon had been the only thing to give an impression of burdensome etiquette and formal constraint to Emma. The front door of Friern Hatch was open, as was usual during the summer day. This door gave entrance into an airy hall and a passage beyond, at the farther end of which was a glass door, through which Emma could see into the shrubbery which spread at the back of the dwelling.

Just as Emma ascended the three broad stone steps which led up to the entrance she caught a glimpse, through the glass door, of the form of Claudia in her lilac muslin and broad-brimmed hat, as she rapidly passed along the shrubbery walk. Emma felt too shy in a stranger's house to call out her name aloud, but ran through the hall, traversed the passage, and passing out through the glass door, soon overtook Claudia, who, book in hand, was hastening towards her shady bower to keep her tryst with the nun.

"Claudia! dear Claudia!"—how unwelcome at that moment were the unexpected call and the light touch of Emma's hand on the arm of her friend!

Claudia started and turned half round, meeting the kindly smile in Emma's gray eyes with a look less expressive of pleasure.

"How fast you walk ; I could scarcely overtake you," cried Emma, panting as she spoke. "Mamma has sent me to ask you to come back with me to share a little feast of strawberries and cream. I should so much enjoy having you with us, dear Claudia !"

"I cannot come to-day—thanks all the same," replied Claudia, annoyed and embarrassed by an invitation which she did not choose to accept, and yet scarcely knew how to decline. She saw that Emma looked disappointed, and tried to turn off the matter with a jest. "I have a particular reason for not passing my ring-fence to-day," she said gaily, "and must show that I have a soul above the temptation even of strawberries and cream."

"So have I," observed Emma laughing. "If you are not coming—if you really cannot come—I shall much prefer staying with you. I see that you are going, book in hand, to your bower ; I will come with you, dear Claudia, and leave the boys to their feast." So saying, Emma affectionately slipped her arm into that of her friend.

Claudia was more and more embarrassed. She was unwilling to give pain or to repel affection, yet

was impatient to get rid of her unwelcome companion. Emma had certainly not the art of feeling her way by that mental sense of touch which we call tact or discernment, which saves its possessor from many a shock to pride and wound to affection, or she would have intuitively perceived that her company was not desired.

"You are very kind, dear Emma," said Claudia in a hesitating tone. "I hope that we may have many pleasant readings together, but—but I do not feel quite up to having a companion this morning."

Claudia was looking particularly rosy at that moment, and her firm rapid step had certainly given no token of indisposition. As her words, however, seemed to be intended to convey such an idea, Emma said, rather coldly, withdrawing her arm from that which she had been affectionately pressing, "Do you mean that you are not very well?"

"She can no more understand a hint than she can an epigram!" thought Claudia, provoked at being thus driven into a corner.

"Perhaps you have a headache?" suggested Emma.

"No, not exactly headache—but—but I intend to study this morning alone." Claudia bit her lip hard as soon as the words had escaped her; her colour rose even to her brow; for the first time

perhaps in her life she had been surprised into uttering an untruth.

Emma was hurt, and, as far as her gentle nature permitted her to be so, offended. With a cold "good-bye" she was turning away when Claudia detained her. "Do not be vexed with me, dear Emma," she said. "If you could only come at some other time—a little later—this afternoon, let us say—"

"Oh, this afternoon I have the class at the school; my time is not all my own; I cannot, like you, walk, read, or write poetry whenever I please," replied Emma, with a full heart, betraying its emotion in the altered tone of her voice. "But I hope to come again—some day," and she turned and retraced her steps, thinking, as Euphemia Long and Annie Goldie had thought before her, that Claudia was capricious and fickle, amusing as a companion, but most unstable as a friend.

Claudia pursued her way down the shrubbery walk, angry with Emma Holder, because angry and disappointed with herself. "How could I say that I intended to be alone," she muttered, "when I am going to spend the morning with Helena? But that stupid girl pressed and tormented me till I scarcely knew what I was speaking. I said what was not true in order to spare her feelings, and have offended

her after all ! I was never aware before this how much characters are moulded by circumstances over which we have no control. I could not have believed yesterday morning that anything on earth would have induced me to do what I have been doing—to use concealment towards my father, and insincerity towards my companion. I know that I am honest in my intentions ; but how is it that my words and actions seem now to require what papa calls ‘the musk-odour of deceit ?’ ”





CHAPTER X.

THE APPOINTED SIGNAL.

CLAUDIA had ample time for such reflections, for she found her rural bower empty. The rustle of leaves as the summer breeze stirred them, the gurgling murmur of the rill, and the drowsy hum of insects were all that she heard as she seated herself on the low lichen-stained bench within. In the absence of sister Helena the misgivings of Claudia increased. What if this fair young nun were some agent employed by the Jesuits subtly to undermine her faith, under the pretext of examining its foundations? Claudia had read of such things being attempted, and was startled as the idea flashed across her that she might possibly herself be the subject of some deep-laid Romanist scheme.

"Ha!" she exclaimed half aloud, as one suddenly recoiling from the brink of a pit-fall, "do they think to draw me into their toils. If I find that there is the slightest attempt to blind my eye

or pervert my principles, I will at once make everything known to my father ; I will not be led one inch, one hair's-breadth farther on a slippery path. Have I not stumbled already !”

Claudia clenched tightly the volume of “D'Aubigné's Reformation,” which she had carried with her to the arbour. Her youthful face assumed almost a stern, defiant expression, which, however, suddenly passed from it, leaving no trace behind, as with pale cheek and downcast eyes, shrouded in her dark robes, Helena glided from the shadow of the trees, and stood at the entrance of the bower.

“I could not come before — I was watched,” said the nun. “Oh ! if you but knew how I have yearned to be again with the only friend near me who pities me, and whom I trust.”

Those soft pleading tones, and the sight of the fair pale countenance of the young speaker, changed the current of Claudia's feelings. She who—but a minute before — had been suspecting a secret plot, resumed the position which she had taken on the preceding day, that of the protectress of one who had been wronged, her destined guide from error to truth. Reproaching herself for having ever entertained a doubt of Helena, Claudia welcomed the nun, and in a few minutes the two, seated side by side, were bending over

the pages of the interesting and valuable volume before them.

It was evident that Helena had at least no desire to draw her companion from the purity of her Protestant faith. The nun remained motionless and still while Claudia eagerly turned from one part of the book to another, guided by markers which she had placed between the leaves, or pencil-lines drawn along the margin of passages that appeared of special importance. Now reading aloud, now condensing the author's arguments into words of her own, with a clearness of reasoning and power of expression which she had inherited from her father, Claudia entered upon her proselytising mission with a vigour and energy which almost surprised herself. "Had you been a boy, Claudia, I do not know which I should have chosen for you, the church or the bar," Mr. Hartswood had once said with a proud smile, as—following his favourite method of training—he had drawn out his daughter's ideas on some disputed theological point. The remark, and the smile with which it was made, had deeply gratified Claudia's vanity, and had acted as a powerful stimulant upon her mental energies. Whether, like other stimulants, its effect had been altogether wholesome, may well be doubted.

Passively sat Helena, with drooping head and

folded hands, as Claudia, with logic and eloquence such as few girls of her age could have displayed, touched upon one point after another of the great controversy between Luther and Rome. It would have been refreshing to the young advocate to have had questions asked, or even objections raised—she almost felt at last as if she were spending her breath on trying to convince a statue.

“But what could I expect,” thought Claudia, “from one brought up in the habit of passive obedience to the commanding will of another? This poor girl listens, as she has been accustomed to listen, without comment or question. Her mind has been cramped by being long kept in a strained, unnatural position; truth, when presented to her, but dazzles, because she has not been accustomed to light.”

Claudia paused at last, almost breathless, with her finger pressed on a passage in the volume which rested on her knee—a passage which she was sure must carry conviction to any unprejudiced mind of the dangerous nature of the doctrines maintained at Rome.

“How deeply you must have studied!” cried Helena, rousing herself at length to speak. “You have doubtless attended some theological class held by a great Protestant teacher.”

"No," replied the gratified Claudia. "My only training on these subjects has been from my father ; he teaches me to read, reflect, and reason."

"What a joy it must be to receive instruction from a parent!" exclaimed Helena, clasping her hands. "But surely you can see but little of your father ; during most of the day is he not absent on business in London?"

"We have our delightful evenings together," said Claudia.

"Ah! how different from the joyless, dreary ones which I pass alone in my cell!" sighed the nun. "You in your luxurious drawing-room—"

"No, not in the drawing-room," interrupted Claudia ; "not in the large decked-out apartment into which strangers are shown. Papa and I sit together in his snug little study, with rows of bookshelves on one side reaching almost to the ceiling, and on the other side his mahogany cabinet in which he keeps his papers, neatly docketed in their pigeon-holes, with a dozen despatch-boxes surmounting the whole. It is a delightful study," continued the lawyer's daughter, "with nothing flimsy or fanciful in it—not a picture, except brown prints of Lord Chancellors in their big wigs ; everything in that room speaks of work, intellectual work—the brass-clamped desk on the leather-covered table—the

parchment-bound volumes beside it—the massive ink-stand—a gift from a client—all, save the beautiful vase—my gift—which I always keep filled with fresh flowers for papa.”

“And there you sit with your father?” said Helena, who appeared to be more interested by pictures of domestic enjoyment than by exposure of Romanist errors.

“He on his arm-chair,” replied Claudia, “I on a stool at his feet. Sometimes papa reads to me, and sometimes I read to him; but during most of the time we converse, and oh, how delightful is such conversation! Papa asks me about my morning studies, or tells me what he has been doing in London. Sometimes he tests my judgment by describing the leading points in cases that have come into court, and asking me, if I were judge, what my decision would be. Papa laughs and rubs his hands if ever I hit on a right one.” Claudia’s eyes beamed with animation while speaking of these happy evenings spent with a parent whom she enthusiastically loved and admired.

“But surely,” observed sister Helena, “Mr. Hartswood’s business must sometimes oblige him to pass the night in London?”

“No, never,” was the reply. “For my sake papa gives up entirely that society in which he used

to shine ; he never, since we came here, has left me to pass one evening alone. I can count on my father's return as I do upon that of the sun ; when I hear the railway-whistle at 6.55 I am certain that the train is bringing papa. The click of the gate, when he opens it, would be as regular as the striking of the clock, were I not constantly beforehand to meet him, so that papa finds the gate wide open, and his daughter ready to welcome him back to his home."

"And then you pass the happy evening together in the study?" said Helena.

"Except, of course, when we have friends to dinner," replied Claudia Hartswood ; "when the dear little study is left to the Lord Chancellors in their gilt frames. This evening we have a few guests from London ; but this is rather a rare event, and may not happen again for weeks."

"Friends from London—not Lady Melton?" asked sister Helena ; for the first time speaking rapidly, and raising her fine eyes to those of Claudia, with an earnest, anxious expression.

"No, not Lady Melton," answered her companion ; "she is papa's client, indeed, but I could not call her his friend. I have never even seen her ; what is she like in personal appearance?" Claudia Hartswood looked keenly at the nun as she asked her the question.

"Lady Melton is short in stature, lively and quick in manner," replied sister Helena, who had resumed her quiet demeanour.

"Is she good-looking?" asked Claudia.

"She might be deemed so, but for a bleuish or mole on her cheek," said the nun.

Claudia scarcely knew why she had asked the questions, nor why she experienced a feeling of satisfaction at the replies according so well with the description of Lady Melton which she had received from her father.

An expression of anxious thought was resting upon the fair countenance of the nun, her brow contracted in a slight frown, while her eyes were abstractedly fixed upon the little brook which flowed near.

"Helena, will you tell me what is passing through your mind?" said Claudia, tenderly. "There is something that perplexes and pains you."

"Can you marvel if a pang of envy should rise, if, when I hear of a happy home, such as yours—a loving father, such as yours—freedom of converse, freedom of faith, such as yours—I should bitterly contrast your lot with my own!" cried Helena, drawing her black veil close round her face, and then drooping her head upon her clasped hands.

"The future may have bright days in store for you yet," suggested the pitying Claudia.

Without uncovering her face, the unhappy nun shook her head, and almost sobbed forth "Never!"

The arm of Claudia was thrown round that fragile, drooping form. "You may count on my aid in any way, at any time!" she exclaimed.

"I may soon be beyond reach of your help," faltered Helena, her voice coming muffled through the veil. "I am suspected by the Lady Superior; watchful eyes are upon me; there are thoughts—I know but too well—of sending me far, far away to a convent where the discipline is fearfully strict—it is, I think, in the Orkney Islands."

"They dare not imprison you against your will in such a wild desolate place!" exclaimed Claudia, the romantic story of the Lady Grange recurring to her mind; "such cruel deeds could not be committed in these days of liberty and light."

"If I be once taken to that isolated convent, I shall never be heard of again," murmured Helena. "To all my happier fellow-creatures it will be as though I had never existed, unless you and Miss Irvine should give a sad thought to a miserable captive, shut up in a living grave." Claudia felt that the form which her arm encircled was violently trembling.

"But you would give me notice before any such barbarous scheme could be put into execution!" cried Claudia; "my father is so true a Protestant, so noble and generous a man, that I am certain that he would let no considerations of personal interest—no, nor of professional etiquette—prevent his giving his powerful protection to a lady wronged and oppressed."

"I might—yes, I might have recourse to your protection should my danger become pressing," said Helena, in a scarcely audible voice. "But how could I give you notice of such danger; I could not approach your dwelling in this dress without drawing upon myself the notice of prying eyes. I have no means of calling you to this spot at any unusual hour, though on a speedy interview with you all my future fate might depend."

Claudia paused for a minute to reflect, then hastily unloosed a little scarf of cerise-coloured gauze which she wore round her neck. "You see the wide-spreading branch of yon fir-tree," she said; "most of the windows at the back of Friern Hatch command a view of that bough. If ever I see this bright scarf fluttering at the end of that branch, I shall know it to be a signal of distress—a token that you need—immediately need—the presence of a friend in this bower."

Helena pressed the scarf to her lips. "You give me life in giving me hope," she murmured. "I look upon your home, dearest, kindest Claudia, as my possible harbour of refuge in case"—the nun lowered her voice—"in case I should find it needful to attempt an escape from the convent."

"I believe that you will be driven to this course," observed Claudia, with a keen relish of the romantic nature of the adventure in which she might have to take a prominent part.

"Would it be impossible, should such flight be forced upon me," said Helena, "for you to bring me here some garments of your own, to enable me to enter your house without attracting the attention of servants?"

"That might certainly be done," replied Claudia; "there is little difference between our heights, and my broad-brimmed straw hat would sufficiently cover your face to prevent its being seen—at least from some distance."

"And you could—you would, I mean—in case of desperate necessity, shelter me for a few hours, or minutes, till I could start off by train for London, and seek protection in the house of Miss Irvine in Grosvenor Square?" The voice of Helena trembled with eagerness as she asked the question.

"I am sure that I could, and would!" exclaimed

the enthusiastic Claudia. "Only," she added, more gravely, "of course I would never conceal such a matter as that from my father."

"I would never ask—never wish you to do so, unless for a very short time," said Helena, "and then only for the sake of his own interests. It would distress me beyond measure to embroil Mr. Hartswood with his client. My aunt is jealous of all interference in her family concerns, save, of course, from the priest. Were her Protestant lawyer to come between her and her niece, she would keenly resent it, and Lady Melton never forgives."

"No one would be more unwilling than myself to place my dear father in a position of delicacy and difficulty," said Claudia. "As far as possible I will keep him clear from any responsibility or blame in regard to my actions."

"I knew it, I knew it!" cried Helena; "you will do all that is generous and right—not refuse succour to a friend, yet guard the peace of a parent." The nun folded the little scarf, and carefully hid it under her dark garment. "This," she continued, "shall rest *on* my heart, the memory of your kindness *within* my heart. There is to me no more convincing proof that Protestants cannot be far wrong in their creed, than the generosity with which I find them ready to do all, risk all, for one

who has no claim upon their help, save the depth of her misery—the greatness of her need.” And, as if moved by an irresistible impulse, Helena sank on the bosom of Claudia, who pressed the nun to her heart.

“This embrace,” thought the young Protestant, “shall give my poor Helena assurance of the truth of my friendship, and of my readiness to make for it any personal sacrifice that may be required. Priests may plot, abbesses may persecute ; like the three who in ‘Marmion’

‘Met to doom in secrecy,’

they may destine this poor orphan to a fate as cruel as that of Constance—dreary exile, imprisonment, penance ; but they shall find that with a warm heart and a quick wit a Protestant girl in this free land is more than a match for them all ”





CHAPTER XI.

FLIGHT.

FOR the rest of that day Helena, and the danger of her being suddenly carried off to the Orkneys, beyond reach of her Protestant friends, were scarcely ever out of the mind of Claudia Hartwood. Many a time she glanced from the window towards that spot in the shrubbery where the end of the dark fir branch could be seen contrasting with the lighter foliage of lilac and lime. At another time the little dinner-party of the evening would have been anticipated with pleasure by Claudia ; but the amusement of a few hours was as nothing compared with the drama in real life which she believed to be opening before her, or rather, in which she expected to act a prominent part. Claudia, as she sat for hours dreamily musing under the shade of the trees, or by the open window of the study, went over in thought every point of the conversation which she had held with Sister Helena, especially that first part in which

the young Protestant had sought to unveil the errors of Rome.

"I think that I put my arguments neatly and forcibly," thought Claudia. "Papa would have said so had he been present. I wish that I could have read what was passing through the mind of my beautiful nun, as she sat so pensive and still. Helena did not attempt to answer one of my arguments—perhaps she felt herself unable to do so; but I hope that they made some impression upon her. I do not suppose that Helena has been accustomed to think deeply; doubtless the energies of the mind, like those of the body, grow weak from want of exercise. A life spent in a convent would be likely to cripple them altogether. But depend upon it," Claudia continued to herself, as if arguing a point with some invisible companion, "Helena will not long continue a nun. The bird will ere long be fledged; it already is trying its wings, and soon we shall find means to throw wide open the door of its cage. Its flight will not be to the Orkneys. No dreary imprisonment in the bleak north shall be for our gentle convert; for Helena will be a convert—of that I am certain. She is evidently ready to listen to truth with an unprejudiced mind, or if there be any prejudice, it is in favour of the views held by the only two beings

who appear to have shown her any disinterested kindness—Miss Irvine and myself. A secret bond of sympathy draws my poor Helena towards me ; she trusts me, she clings to me ; I shall have power over her reason through her affections.” It was with great complacency that the enthusiastic Claudia dwelt upon this idea. She had longed from her childhood to have a friend ; but a friend who should owe everything to her kindness,—freedom—happiness—even knowledge of religious truth,—was more than she had ever before ventured to hope for. “ I am very young to attempt the great work of converting a Romanist,” thus pleasantly flowed on the current of thought ; “ I shall not till next month be sixteen years of age, and I do not remember reading of a single instance of a girl of sixteen being the means of actually converting a nun. It is early to follow on the track of Luther, it is early to begin a great work for God.”

There was no faithful monitor beside her to whisper to the youthful enthusiast, “ Is the work which you are so zealously undertaking indeed *for God* ; is it his glory that you are seeking, or the glory of Claudia Hartwood ? While you are employing questionable means to gain a certain end, are you certain that even that end will bear the searching light of truth ? How much of the dross

of self-seeking mingles with the pure gold of zeal ! The glistening serpent-trail is already on your outer actions ; may it not be that the serpent himself has found a lurking-place in your heart ? ”

Claudia prided herself on her mental powers, her delicacy of perception, her quickness of comprehension, altogether unconscious that on some subjects, and those the highest, most important of all, she was yet as ignorant as an infant.

The glorious summer sun was sloping towards the west ; rays of golden light were streaming upwards through breaks in the clouds that mantled his downward path. The clock had struck six, and Claudia rose from her seat in the study with the intention of going to her room to change her dress for evening attire, so as to be ready to receive her father's guests from London, when, ere she turned from the window, her eyes once more sought that point in the shrubbery below where stretched out the long branch of fir. Claudia started as she looked forth. No cluster of bright coloured blossoms could suddenly have bloomed upon yon dark tree ! Claudia gazed fixedly, leaning forth from the window, and grasping the sill, which was almost the height of her waist. She had not expected to see Helena's signal so soon, but surely it was the scarf of cerise which now trembled in the light breeze !

Without waiting to put on her straw hat which was hanging up in the hall, without waiting to go round to the door which opened on the back-shrubbery, Claudia took the most rapid means of making her exit from the house. One step on the chair from which she had just risen, and in a moment the active girl had made her way over the sill out of the window, and with quick step was taking the shortest cut down the shrubbery towards her shady bower. Aytoun, the gardener, who was tying up some roses, looked up in surprise as the young lady flitted past, her long hair flowing back disordered from the rapidity of her movements, as she met bareheaded the fresh western breeze. Claudia could hardly refrain from running before she reached a turn in the shrubbery walk where the bushes would screen her from observation.

The bower was speedily reached. Helena was standing in the shadow, evidently on the watch for her friend, and looking flushed and excited. The nun caught Claudia by both her hands as she entered, and eagerly—tremulously exclaimed, "It is as I feared—the bridge is being cut away behind me—early to-morrow I shall be on my way to the North!" and turning suddenly away after she had uttered the words, Helena sank on the bench, and buried her face in the folds of her veil.

"How can it be—whence this sudden decision?" cried Claudia.

"I told you that I feared that I was suspected, now I am certain that I am so," said Helena, her voice so smothered by her veil, that Claudia had to bend close to her to catch the meaning of what she uttered. "I had scarcely returned from our meeting this morning, when I was summoned into the presence of the Mother Superior. Oh, with what icy hardness and coldness she announced to me that my fate was decided, that I must leave my present abode for a branch establishment in the Orkneys, and that I must start, with one of the sisters, on my long dreary journey at sunrise. In vain I pleaded, in vain I wept, declared that my health would not stand a rude climate, that I had not strength for the journey; the only boon which I could obtain was that I might pass the intervening time in my cell alone, to give myself up to fasting and prayer."

Claudia Hartswood winced at the words. "And yet," thought she, "could I in reason expect perfect candour from one brought up in a system so false? My poor nun is forced into deceit; the fault is not hers, but that of the tyrants who oppress her under the much abused name of religion."

"I would have fled to you at once," pursued

Helena, "but it was impossible for me to make my escape unseen until the sisters had gathered together for service in chapel. And now I have come to throw myself on your mercy!" and to the surprise of Claudia the nun sank at her feet, and clasped her knees, in an attitude of almost despairing supplication.

"Helena, my friend, rise—rise! I cannot suffer this!" exclaimed Claudia, raising the drooping form of the nun. "You know my heart, you know that you have but to say in what way I can serve you." The enthusiast pressed Helena to her bosom, and then made her resume her place at her side. It was several minutes before the nun was able to speak, a convulsive tremor passed through her frame, she could scarcely command her voice.

"I tore a leaf from my breviary and wrote on it a few lines in pencil to Miss Irvine, which, confided to the faithful old gardener of whom I spoke to you before, I believe—I feel sure that my friend will receive. The old man promised to convey that slip before morning to Grosvenor Square."

"What did you write to Miss Irvine?" asked Claudia, with a slight emotion of jealousy towards Helena's unknown protectress.

"I told her that I was wretched, and constrained to fly from tyranny which was supportable no

longer ; that I had one friend here, most generous, most true, but that regard for her father's interests debarred me from availing myself fully of her goodness. I implored Miss Irvine to send some one to meet me at the station in London on the arrival of the earliest morning train, for I should never know how to find my way through the city; I have never travelled alone, I am helpless and ignorant as a babe, and—" Helena could not finish her sentence, her whole frame was in a violent tremble.

"Be calm, dear one, be calm," said Claudia soothingly, laying her caressing hand upon the arm of the nun.

"And now," continued Helena, after a strong effort to restrain her emotion, "I dare not go back to the convent, I dare not return to my cell, for at sunset the doors will be locked and barred, and if I miss my present opportunity of making my escape, I never shall have another. I propose to pass the night—sleep for me there can be none—alone in this quiet green bower; then, at earliest dawn, make my way to the station."

"Pass the night here—in the darkness and damp!" exclaimed Claudia. "Do you think I—that my father would suffer such a thing! No, no, you must find shelter under our roof, I will explain everything to papa. How unfortunate it is," ex-

claimed Claudia, striking her brow, "that we should have guests this very evening! I shall have no opportunity of speaking quietly with papa until they have left."

"Better, perhaps, to tell Mr. Hartswood nothing till the morning," suggested the nun. "If you could but hide me for the few hours of darkness in some, in any corner of your dwelling, but let me have the shelter of a roof over my homeless head, never would I, till death, forget what I should owe to your friendship."

Claudia pressed her forehead for some moments in anxious reflection. "The study will be perfectly empty as long as our guests are in the house," she murmured, as if thinking aloud; "the passage leading to it from the hall is shut out by a double door to keep out draughts, and by the little back staircase it communicates with my room. Yes, yes, you might be quiet enough in that part of the dwelling, in my room when Garrard shuts the shutters of the study, down in the study when my maid is engaged upstairs with me. Yes, yes," said Claudia more cheerfully, "between the two rooms we can hide you very well till the morning, so my only care must be now to smuggle you into the house, without any one seeing you enter, for I should not like to get dear papa into a scrape with his client; he

will be glad when he hears that the affair has been quietly managed."

"If I could only have gone straight to Miss Irvine, I should have caused no trouble," observed Helena. "Only, I do not know how I could travel alone in the dress of a nun."

"Ah, yes—the dress," cried Claudia starting up from her seat. "Wait here for two minutes, Helena, I'll be back like a flash of lightning."

And at full speed the eager girl bounded up the shrubby walk, till the sight of Aytoun, busy in the verbena-plot, made her suddenly change her pace to one more sober. Panting with excitement, Claudia went up to the gardener, whom she was anxious to get out of the way, that he might not see the nun enter the house. She could hardly find breath to address him.

"Aytoun, go to the station to meet papa. Gentlemen are coming with him from London; there may be something for you to carry."

Aytoun touched his hat, and turned to his verbena. "I'll just ha' time to finish this 'ere job first," said the man.

"No, go directly," cried Claudia imperatively; and ransacking her mind for some excuse for her haste, she added, "for I want you first to call at the miller's and ask his wife to come here in the morning."

Claudia, having given her order, went on her way with an uneasy consciousness that she was beginning to stoop to make use of that paltry trickery which she had always hitherto despised. She could not conceal from herself the fact that she whose pride it had always been to follow a straightforward course, was now doubling like a fox. "I mustn't desert my friend—I can't get papa into trouble," she muttered to herself, trying by such considerations to overpower what, notwithstanding her zeal in behalf of the nun, offended at once her pride and her moral perceptions.





CHAPTER XII.

SMUGGLING.

CLAUDIA sprang up the staircase, two steps at a time, and hurriedly entered her own apartment. She was annoyed to find in it Martha, her maid, engaged in laying out the white muslin dress which her young lady was to wear in the evening.

"I am afraid that you'll be late, miss," observed the waiting-woman, as she went up to the toilette-table and took from the drawer brush and comb to bring the refractory locks of Miss Hartswood into something like order.

"I can't dress just now, never mind these things," said Claudia, only intent on getting the maid out of the room. "I'm busy—go to the drawing-room, and see—see that fresh flowers are put in the vases."

"I filled the vases this afternoon," replied Martha. "You have really, miss, not much time left for dressing for dinner."

"I tell you I'm not ready," cried Claudia, with impatience ; "leave me alone for five minutes."

The maid retired slowly, with a dissatisfied glance at her young mistress's hair, all blown about her face by the wind. Claudia hurried to her wardrobe and took out thence a blue silk dress ; in her careless haste she caught her own muslin in the handle of a drawer, and rent it in extricating it. Then, brushing rapidly past her table, Claudia threw down a china inkstand, but did not pause to raise it from the carpet.

Down the front staircase hastened Claudia, as Martha had retired by the back one. Garrard, in the dining-room, was laying the table for dinner, and the door which opened on the hall was wide open, so that he could see her as she passed.

"It seems as if all the household were loitering about, as if on the watch," thought the conscious Claudia. "If Helena go through the hall, she will be certain to come upon Garrard. She must get through the study window as I got out ; I will close the red door which shuts off that room from the public apartments, and then there will be little risk of her suddenly meeting with any of the household."

Claudia did so, and again hurried out into the open air. She was half-way down the shrubbery

before it occurred to her mind that she had forgotten the broad-brimmed hat, which was quite as necessary a part of the nun's equipment as the dress.

"Thoughtless—careless that I am," muttered Claudia, as she turned back to repair her omission ; "but it is so new a thing to me to have to plot and to plan ; I blunder, for I never have been accustomed to feel my way in the dark."

Claudia was glad to find that Aytoun had quitted the garden, and felt as if she had accomplished the most troublesome part of her task when she re-entered the bower, panting, with the dress on her arm, and the hat on her head, its untied strings streaming behind her. Helena was eagerly awaiting her return.

"There—I must go back as quickly as possible," cried Claudia, as she snatched off the hat and threw down the dress. "When you have changed your attire for one less sure to attract attention, follow yon winding path up the shrubbery, it will lead to the back of our house. Do not enter through the door—there are people about—you will see a window wide open, the window that is of the study ; enter by it, and await me ; I will join you in a very few minutes, but I must now go and prepare to receive the guests of my father."

Claudia hastened away to perform a very rapid

toilette, starting in the midst of it at the sound of the whistle which announced her father's arrival at the station.

Without waiting to put in ear-ring, clasp on bracelet, or suffer her maid to give any finishing touch to her hair, Claudia tripped rapidly down-stairs in her rustling muslin attire to the study, in which, as she had expected, she found Sister Helena.

Strangely altered looked the nun in her borrowed dress; Claudia would scarcely have recognized in her the pale mournful recluse whom she had hitherto seen in long black robe and shrouding veil, the linen bandage across her forehead, the rosary hanging from her waist.

Helena started at the sudden entrance of her friend. She appeared confused, and almost alarmed.

"Up to my room, Helena," cried Claudia; "my father and his companions walk from the station, and may possibly change their boots in this study. When the guests are once at dinner, you can return here if you will, certain of no interruption. My door is the one straight before you at the top of the staircase—I have sent away my maid—remain in my room till you hear the dinner-gong sound."

Helena's only reply was a smile, as she glided past Claudia to the little back-stairs.

"I like her smile less than her look of sadness,"

thought Claudia, as she opened the red door before mentioned, and went through the hall into the drawing-room, where she proposed to receive her guests. "It is strange what a difference is made by a mere change of dress ! Helena as the persecuted nun, looked the most interesting of beings this morning ; and this evening, with the red glow of sunset full on her features, they seemed to me almost commonplace. Certainly I had never before seen them so distinctly, they were so much shadowed by her veil. Perhaps there are few faces that will bear a full stream of daylight, and few characters either," mused Claudia, as, after the excitement of the last hour, she sank quietly down on the drawing-room sofa, to wait and to think. Doubts were flitting across her, as the noiseless-winged bats across the deep sky when twilight has faded away, passing so rapidly as to leave no defined image on the mind, only the impression that something dark had gone by. Claudia thought of her mirror of truth ; she could not connect the idea of Helena with that of a stainless image ; if a mist had gathered on the reflections of Euphemia, Annie, and Emma, that of the fair fugitive nun still less would bear the test. Helena had owned herself guilty of falsehood, and had owned it as if unconscious that such a falsehood was wrong. But it was not this that most disturbed the peace of

Claudia. It was the consciousness that she herself had been drawn into acting a part, into speaking words inconsistent with truth, that she had been induced to mix herself up with plots and schemes requiring disguise and concealment.

"I have been surprised into taking strange steps," reflected Claudia; "how astonished papa will be when I tell him all, as I certainly shall do either to-night or to-morrow. I wonder whether he will consider Helena justified in breaking her vows and flying from her convent, because she finds the life of a nun intolerable, and was to be sent against her will to a wild, bleak, northern island?" Claudia rose and paced up and down the drawing-room, for thought made her too restless to sit still. "Catherine Bore, indeed, escaped from her convent, after she had embraced the doctrines of Luther. She lived to be a happy wife and mother. I do not suppose that Lady Melton will be able to force her niece back to her convent, even if she find out her place of retreat with Miss Irvine. Helena will surely be able to claim the protection of English law. I will consult my father upon that question—I wish I could have consulted him from the first; but then his client would have been so indignant had she ever discovered that he had been a consenting—an active party in forwarding the escape of the orphan whom

she believed that she had succeeded in sacrificing to her own worldly interests."

Claudia's reflections were interrupted by the cheerful sound of her father's voice in the hall, which he had just entered, as he laughed with his companions at some lively anecdote which one of them had related during the walk from the station. Claudia did not go to meet her parent, as he was not alone, but turned to resume her seat on the sofa, catching sight, as she did so, of her own reflection in the gilded mirror over the mantel-piece.

"No one can accuse me of vanity," murmured Claudia, as she hastily smoothed back her hair with her ungloved hands. "I was too eager to go to my friend, too impatient to dismiss my attendant, to take much care of my own appearance. I hope that papa will not be vexed." Perhaps that expression of hope, very different from one of assurance, had reference to something beyond the young lady's neglect of her toilette.





CHAPTER XIII.

ROMANISM.

CLAUDIA, absorbed in one object, had felt that the entertainment of guests would be irksome, and had wished that the little party had been invited for any evening rather than this. Nevertheless she enjoyed the pleasant society of the few friends who gathered around Mr. Hartswood's hospitable board. Mr. Latham, a clergyman from London, came with his wife, who had been from childhood a friend of Claudia's mother. Mrs. Latham was a gentle loving woman, upon whom family trials and delicate health had left a stamp of pensive thought, not gloom; but something that always reminded Claudia of the holy stillness of twilight. Mrs. Latham, without casting any shadow on the gaiety of those around her, elevated the tone of any society into which she might enter; mirth became more refined in her presence, though not less sparkling. Her husband was a man of pleasant manners and cultivated mind, and

Claudia was glad that his place during dinner-time would be by her side.

Much of mirth, and much of wit, was there at the table of Mr. Hartswood. The two barristers who had come with him by train, vied with each other in contributing clever jests and good stories to the intellectual feast; but Mr. Hartswood himself was the life and soul of the party. Never had Claudia seen her father in higher spirits or more humorous vein. He capped every story with one more amusing, and his playful repartees showed that he wielded the light weapon of wit with the skill of a master fencer. Claudia was even more proud than usual of her father, as she sat an amused and admiring auditor.

After awhile, Mr. Hartswood and one of the lawyers engaged in an argument of too professional a nature to be of interest to all the circle, and the murmur of more general conversation arose. Mr. Latham devoted his attention to Claudia. The clergyman had travelled a good deal on the Continent, and was willing, and pleased, to draw from the resources of his personal experience for the amusement of his young friend.

Claudia did not forget Helena. The peculiar position of the nun; her state of indecision and doubt as regarded matters of doctrine made Claudia

eager for information regarding countries in which the Roman Catholic religion prevails. The lawyer's daughter questioned Mr. Latham about convents and their inmates, and the various superstitious customs which prove that Romanism, however outwardly modified by time and circumstances, is yet essentially the same system as that against whose errors Luther raised his voice more than three centuries ago.

Mr. Latham had been to Naples; he had witnessed, in the church of St. Chiara, the burial-place of the Royal Family, the so-called annual miracle of the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius.* He described the chapel rich in plate, silver relieves on the altar, silver lamps, silver life-size images of saints. He told how crowds thronged the chapel so densely that it was scarcely possible even for bishop or cardinal to push his way up to the altar. Mr. Latham described the appearance of women, decked out in finery, who, calling themselves relations of St. Januarius (or Gennaro), with loud appeals implored the saint to perform the expected miracle. "Gennaro!" they cried, "do you not hear us? why do you make us wait so long? Gennaro, are you asleep?"

* The description is taken from that of an English spectator of the scene in 1856. —See "The Trinity of Italy."

"Did it not remind you," observed Claudia, "of the priests of Baal on Carmel? Only, that was a very solemn scene; and there must, at least to Protestants, have been something ludicrous in this."

Mr. Latham went on to describe how, amidst loud sounds of prayer and chanting, and the wild cries of the women, a priest stood gazing on a phial containing some dark substance, supposed to be blood, which he held in his hand. "Earnestly he watched it, as if in anxiety to discover the first sign of the solid becoming a liquid; a kind of miracle, by the way, to be easily enough performed by any good chemist. Then a bishop came to his side, and as priest and bishop together gazed on the phial, a light of joy broke over their features; the expectant crowds became maddened by excitement; the cries swelled into a roar; the relic was held up on high, a voice shouted, *Il miracolo è fatto!* half frantic boys rushed from behind a screen, one scattering rose-leaves, the other setting free some imprisoned birds. A cloud of smoke from a bonfire curled up from the tower of the cathedral; the cannon of the mole, the fleet, the castle of St. Elmo, announced to city and country the glorious tidings that the dark solid kept in a phial had become, for a time, a liquid again!"

"If St. Paul could have been present at such a

scene," observed Claudia, "would he not have rent his clothes as he did at the superstition of the people of Lystra. One can scarcely realize such things taking place in these days which we call enlightened, and that grave cardinals and bishops should countenance them by their presence."

"Turn to another part of the globe," said Mr. Latham; "see how in Jerusalem itself occurs, year by year, a scene much of the same kind as that which I witnessed in Naples. In the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, crowds throng to behold what they suppose to be the annual miracle of fire descending from heaven. The members of the Greek Church, and the members of the Romanist there, push, struggle, contend against each other for the best places, with a fierce rancour which would disgrace spectators of a play or a bull-fight. The uproar and confusion are tremendous: actual bloodshed sometimes ensues, and the Turks—*Mohammedans*—are actually forced to interfere to prevent those who call themselves Christians from killing one another in the blind fury which superstition inspires."

"Surely the fact that Rome countenances such impostures is sufficient proof that she cannot hold the Truth in simplicity," observed Claudia. "What would the Apostle Peter have said to the doings of those who look upon the Popes as his successors!"

“The fisherman of Galilee would have marvelled, no doubt, could he have seen his so-called successor enthroned in earthly pomp and splendour, with princes prostrate before him, and kissing his foot,” said the clergyman.

“Is it not from this supposed succession from St. Peter that the popes claim their infallibility?” asked Claudia Hartswood.

“Their claim is like a prodigious edifice raised on a foundation of chaff,” replied Mr. Latham. “The Papists have first to prove that St. Peter ever was Bishop of Rome at all—which they cannot prove from the Bible. They have then to show that he ever transmitted the powers intrusted to him to other bishops. And, were it possible to do this, they have further to trace the historical line of popes down from the earliest times to the present; in the attempt to do which they will find themselves involved in a chaos of confusion. You are perhaps aware, my young friend, that at one period there were *three popes at once*, so that the people could not agree in deciding which was the right one. One pope has sometimes reversed the decrees of his infallible (!) predecessor! Pope Formoso, in the year 896, was actually *excommunicated after his death*, and his body thrown into the Tiber by the following pope.”

"Oh, I am sure that in their hearts Romanists cannot believe the pope to be infallible, whatever they may say with their lips!" exclaimed Claudia.

"They do not honour him always, even with their lips," observed Mr. Latham with a smile. "I was reading to-day a memoir of the great Italian statesman, Massimo d'Azeglio, written by Count Maffei, also an Italian of distinction and talent. I was greatly struck by the words which he records as having been spoken of the present pope, Pius IX., *by the chief of the Jesuits*, in 1847. 'The present pope is the scourge of the Church; there is no remedy but the bell of the Capitol;' *that being the bell which sounds on the death of popes.*"

Claudia opened her eyes wide in surprise, that a Jesuit, the most Romanist of all Romanists, could possibly have spoken thus of the infallible head of his Church.

"To return to history," said Mr. Latham, who took pleasure in discoursing with a listener so intelligent as Claudia; "it must be hard for the advocates of the pope's infallibility to reconcile the doctrine with one striking fact. Pope Gregory the Great, one of the most distinguished of all the so-called successors of St. Peter, thus wrote to the Archbishop of Constantinople of the wickedness of any bishop claiming supreme authority over the

Church. His words struck me so much that I committed them to memory. Thus wrote Pope Gregory : *'Call no man your father on earth ; what then, dearest brother, will you say in that terrible trial of the coming Judge, when you have sought to be called by the world, not only father, but general Father.'*"

"Then," cried Claudia, "Gregory condemned not one, but a whole host of his own successors, who, as *popes* (that means, *papa*), claim to be universal fathers. How striking, and to the point, was his quotation from the Gospel. I wonder that it does not occur to Romanists, when they read over that verse, that it condemns their religious system."

"You must remember," remarked Mr. Latham, "that Romanists are not encouraged to study the Bible. L'Abbé*? . . . , a French clergyman, affirms, 'You have not in Paris ten pious women who have read the Gospel through once : you have ten thousand who have read "The Imitation" † twenty times.' It is evident that what Rome especially dreads is the pure, *unmixed* Word of God."

Claudia longed to be able to speak to Mr. Latham on the subject of Helena, to consult him regarding the fugitive nun. She probably would have done

* Author of "Le Maudit."

† A Romanist work.

so had she not feared to be overheard by one of the barristers present. As it was, she considered that, through her conversation with the clergyman, she had been laying up what her father called "ammunition," to maintain her arguments against the errors of Rome. Absorbed in the intellectual exercise of the hour, with all her proselyting zeal revived, and conscious that she had left a favourable impression of her sense and intellect on the mind of Mr. Latham, Claudia forgot all her doubts and misgivings. She felt herself again a champion of truth; a follower of Luther; an honoured instrument of protecting an oppressed maiden; and of converting a deluded nun. Claudia was sorry when her colloquy with Mr. Latham was brought to a close, by her having, at the end of the repast, to accompany his wife to the drawing-room, leaving the gentlemen to converse on politics, or similar subjects, over their fruit and their wine.





CHAPTER XIV.

SPIRITUAL SENSES.



RS. LATHAM was by no means an insipid companion. When she was alone with Claudia Hartswood, conversation soon found a deeper channel than it usually takes when ladies meet together, apparently only to discuss the weather, dress, or the most trifling topics of the day. Mrs. Latham, under her quiet exterior, was a keen observer of character, and had a considerable insight into that of Claudia Hartswood. The lady saw great energy, strength of will, and self-reliance in her youthful companion — qualities which might incite her to an apparent disregard of the opinion of the world — while strong love of approbation actually lay at the root of the whole. Mrs. Latham knew that a keen admiration for truth might be consistent with ignorance of truth — keen intelligence on some subjects, with absolute blindness on others. As Mrs. Latham now glanced at Claudia's rich luxuriant tresses, which the young girl had been on that

evening too impatient to smooth into order, the lady could not help mentally drawing an analogy between them and the mind of their wearer.

"How lovely these flowers are, and how fragrant!" observed Mrs. Latham, as she drew towards herself one of the vases which adorned the drawing-room table.

Claudia had known Mrs. Latham so long, that she felt quite at ease with the friend of her mother. The observation as to the fragrance of the nosegay recalled to her mind her conversation with her father on the preceding evening; and, well pleased to show that she could dabble a little in metaphysics, Claudia told her guest of the analogy traced between physical and mental senses.

Mrs. Latham listened quietly to the description of imagination, comprehension, judgment, discernment, and moral perceptions, as the sight, hearing, taste, touch, and sense of smell of the mind. "Did you go no further?" she then observed, with a smile. "Did you not rise from considering the faculties of the mind to the spiritual senses of the renewed soul?"

"I am afraid that you will think me dull," said Claudia frankly; "but really I do not understand you."

"We have a threefold nature," observed Mrs.

Latham. "As the intellectual is higher than the physical, so is the spiritual higher than the intellectual, and it has gifts and powers of its own."

"Sight, for instance?" asked Claudia, whose curiosity was awakened by ideas which to her were new.

"Yes, *sight*," replied Mrs. Latham, "utterly distinct from and immeasurably more valuable than that mental sight which you call imagination. *Open Thou mine eyes, that I may see wondrous things out of Thy law*, is not a prayer for any gift merely intellectual. When Saul of Tarsus fell with blinded eyes to the earth, then the eyes of his soul were opened, he saw himself to be a sinner, he saw the Saviour as the only hope of sinners, he had received a new spiritual sense, with a new spiritual nature."

"Yes, that is true as regards him," observed Claudia.

"And so, my dear young friend, we find that there is—if we may so speak—a spiritual ear. *Hear, and your soul shall live; he that hath ears to hear, let him hear*, means something far more than mere intellectual comprehension; nay, may be found where there is scarcely any mental power at all. The poor imbecile may have the hearing ear of obedience; while it is recorded that a talented

statesman, after listening to a gifted preacher of the truth, was heard to exclaim, 'I cannot understand a word that he says!' The physical ear was open, the mental sense most acute, but *spiritual* hearing was altogether wanting. This is the case with all those who are not converted."

"Converted!" repeated Claudia. "A heathen may be converted to Christianity, or a Papist to the Protestant faith; but those who have been brought up to know the truth since they were christened as babies have nothing to be converted from—or converted to—that I can see."

"The celebrated Wesley, one of the greatest preachers that the world has known since the times of the apostles, took a different view of the subject," replied Mrs. Latham, mildly. "After being not only brought up as befitted a clergyman's son, but having himself taken holy orders and laboured earnestly for souls—having even crossed the Atlantic to preach the gospel as a missionary—what did he say of his own spiritual state? 'It is now two years and almost four months since I left my native country in order to teach the Georgian Indians the nature of Christianity, but what have I learned of myself in the meantime? Why, what I least suspected—that I, who went to America to convert others, *was myself never converted to God.*'"

Claudia looked surprised, perplexed, and a little uneasy. She had been trained by her father to think, but here was a new field of thought opening before her, into which she half feared to enter. She was silent for some seconds, and then observed, "I hope that you won't be shocked at what I am going to say, but I've heard of some people, chiefly poor ignorant people, getting into a state of excitement, crying and groaning, and then declaring that they have been converted; and perhaps for folk who have been thieves and drunkards such conversion may be a very good thing, but for respectable intelligent persons, who have always loved truth and maintained it,"—Claudia stopped; she did not know in what way to finish her sentence.

"For such you think that conversion is not needed?" inquired Mrs. Latham. Claudia's glance gave an affirmative answer.

"And yet, dear girl, we must remember who it was who said, *Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.* And these solemn words are explained by those of St. Paul, *If any man be in Christ he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold all things are become new.*"

"Must there always be a sudden change?" asked Claudia, who felt a strong spirit of resistance rising

up within her against a doctrine far
her pride to be readily received.

"The change is not by any means always sudden," replied Mrs. Latham; "with many it is as gradual as the change in Nature wrought by the coming of spring, and it is then impossible to know the day or the hour when the new life was breathed into the soul. Nay, with some Christians conversion takes place so early, that no time can be remembered when the heart was not given to God."

"Then how can one possibly decide whether he be converted or not?" asked Claudia, with slight impatience.

"Are you not conscious of your physical senses?" inquired Mrs. Latham. "Do you not know that you can hear me and see me?"

"Certainly," replied Claudia, with a smile.

"Are you not also conscious of the exercise of your intellectual faculties—imagination, comprehension, discernment?"

"I cannot help being conscious of possessing them," replied the lawyer's daughter.

"And so with those spiritual senses, which are a part of the new spiritual nature," observed Mrs. Latham, earnestly. "The converted one can say with deeper meaning than the once blind man of whom we read in the Gospel, *This I know, that*

whereas I was blind, now I see. His spiritual eyes are opened to the light; and that light shows him his own helpless, hopeless state by nature, and the richness, fulness, completeness of that salvation offered to him in the gospel. *The world by wisdom knew not God; that knowledge which is life eternal comes by no mere effort of human intelligence."*

"I wonder whether my friend considers *me* to be spiritually blind!" thought Claudia Hartswood. She then observed aloud, "There is one of the mental senses which you will agree with me is the same as the spiritual—*moral perceptions*, disgust at sin and approval of what is good, must show that their possessor has spiritual life, whether he call himself converted or not."

Mrs. Latham gently shook her head. "Paul of Tarsus had strong moral perceptions; what he deemed to be sin he hated, what he deemed to be truth he upheld, long ere he had received new life from above. What was the effect upon Paul when spiritual perceptions had been bestowed? From his own righteousness, which had been to him as fragrant incense offered to God, he turned as from that which breathed of corruption; while doctrines which he had formerly loathed refreshed and delighted his soul. He could say to the Saviour

whom he once had rejected, *Thy name is as ointment poured forth.*"

"I suppose that you then consider that there is spiritual judgment distinct from mental judgment," said Claudia.

"We have various references to it in the Holy Scriptures," replied Mrs. Latham. "The mind tastes, judges, and decides in matters regarding things of earth; but it was no mere exercise of intellect to which David referred when he cried, *O taste and see that the Lord is good! How sweet are Thy words to my taste! Sweeter also than honey and honey-comb.* To perceive this sweetness, to relish and enjoy it, belongs not to unconverted human nature; it is one of the spiritual senses belonging to the soul which grace has renewed."

"You have drawn an analogy between four of the spiritual and bodily senses," said Claudia; "there is yet one on which you have not spoken. You have called spiritual knowledge *sight*, spiritual understanding *hearing*, and have told me your ideas about spiritual judgment and perceptions; but what do you consider as answering to the bodily sense of feeling?"

"I should say *faith*," replied Mrs. Latham, "by which we lay hold on the promises of God, by which we realize the existence of what is invisible. In the very imperfect state of our spiritual knowledge

(for we only see through a glass darkly) *we walk by faith, and not by sight.* We *feel*, as it were, the guiding hand of Him whom as yet we see not, believing where we cannot understand, trusting when all is dark before us."

At this point the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Hartswood and his gentlemen guests. Claudia by no means regretted the interruption. The impression left by that conversation upon her mind was at the time not pleasant, though it was often afterwards to be recalled with different emotions. Claudia was rather disposed to cavil at what she considered the fanciful notions of one who might be pious, but who was not very wise.

"What! are we to suppose that there is a distinct and higher order of senses, belonging to a distinct and higher kind of nature, which may be wanting in the most intellectual of men, and yet be possessed by a charity-child or a pauper—old, deaf, and blind?" Such was the question which Claudia asked herself, with almost a feeling of indignation at the bigotry of her friend. "Let this lady bewilder herself, if she pleases, with her wild ideas of new life and conversion; I have a practical work before me, which even she might deem noble and holy—that of convincing and converting a young misguided Romanist."



CHAPTER XV.

DISCOVERY.

THE pleasant little party was over; Mr. Hartswood had handed Mrs. Latham to her carriage, and the barristers, having accepted her offer of seats in the conveyance, had taken leave of their friendly host. Claudia did not regret the departure of the guests, for she was full of impatience to return to Helena.

"Shall I tell my father to-night of my romantic visitor?" thought Claudia, half eager and yet half afraid to make her parent the sharer of her secret.

Before she had decided the question, Mr. Hartswood returned from the hall, as Mrs. Latham's carriage was driven away.

"My girl," said the lawyer rather brusquely, as he laid his hands on the shoulders of his daughter, and surveyed her with a critical look expressive of some disapprobation, "books and brushes are not incompatible things; the outside of the head needs some attention as well as the inside. The next

time that I invite guests to my house, remember that I care less for your talking like a scholar than for your looking like a lady ;” and, adding a kiss to the hint, Mr. Hartswood bade his daughter good-night.

Claudia was little accustomed to receive even so mild a reproof from her father, and was keenly sensitive to the mildest symptom of his displeasure. Those few words from Mr. Hartswood took from her all inclination to speak to him at that time on the subject of Helena. With silent mortification, the spoiled girl returned her father's good-night kiss, and hurried up-stairs to her room, where she expected to find the young nun, who would, of course, quit the study before there was any likelihood of its being entered by Mr. Hartswood. Claudia had taken the precaution of telling Martha that she would not be required to assist her toilette at night, in order that Helena might not be disturbed by the entrance of the maid.

The mind of Claudia, as regarded her fugitive friend, was something in the state of a pendulum—vibrating between the proud assurance that she herself was performing a noble act in protecting the nun, and a suspicion that all could not be right where such secrecy was required. Claudia's mind was moved by the former feeling as she opened the

door of her room, and glanced around, expecting to see before her the graceful form of Helena. The apartment was, however, empty and still. The lighted candles on the toilette-table showed the presence of no stranger. Perhaps Helena had retreated into the large wardrobe when Martha had come in to light these candles. Claudia went up to the wardrobe and opened it, softly murmuring the name of the nun; but there was no one to reply.

"Surely she cannot have been so incautious as to remain in the study!" exclaimed Claudia, in alarm; "if so, she will meet papa before I have had time to prepare him for seeing her, as he always reads or writes in that room before going to rest! What will he think, what will he say? How wrong I was not to tell all!" Claudia's glance at that moment fell upon an envelope which lay on her toilette-table, directed in pencil to herself. With eager curiosity Claudia tore open the envelope, and read as follows:—

"DEAREST,—I dare not stay till daylight. I go by the night-train. *Say nothing to your father till the morning.* I will write from Grosvenor Square. Yours till death.—S. H."

Claudia read the hurried scrawl over and over again, and each time with a countenance more

clouded. She was both surprised and disappointed at her intended proselyte thus suddenly vanishing from her view, disconcerting her plans, and leaving her only the humiliation of having been drawn into acting a part inconsistent with her natural candour. The pendulum was swinging backwards; Claudia was discontented both with her nun and herself.

"Helena is dealing strangely by me," muttered Claudia Hartswood, as she seated herself in front of the toilette-glass, gazing fixedly into it with an air of abstraction. "It is scarcely of a piece with her nervous timidity and fear of taking a step alone, that she should go off suddenly in the night, without giving me notice, as if her life were in peril. I am afraid that papa will be annoyed when I tell him of what has occurred. He will, however, do justice at least to my motives." Again the lawyer's daughter glanced at the note from the nun. "Helena does not even write a lady-like hand," she muttered; then folding up the note, Claudia tore it in half, held the two pieces to the flame of a candle, and watched the paper as it blazed, curled, turned black, and fell into ashes.

"I wonder whether mine has been but a foolish fancy, an idle bit of romance," thought Claudia; "the flaring up of a sudden friendship, leaving, like those fragments of paper, nothing behind but a few

ashes, to be blown away by a breath! I could almost imagine that the events of these two days have passed in a dream—that my beauteous, dark-eyed nun, with her beads and crucifix, her soft voice and mournful story, has had no existence but in my own brain.”

Claudia was startled from her reflections by hearing the study-bell rung loudly, then almost instantly rung again in a yet more peremptory way. She started to her feet, and, as she did so, heard the study door opened with violence, and the sound of her father's voice raised to a most unusual pitch, as he called out, “Garrard! Garrard!” Mr. Hartswood was of so equable a temperament, and life at Friern Hatch was wont to flow on in so quiet and even a current, that a loud repeated ringing and an angry voice were quite sufficient to cause some alarm in the bosom of Claudia. With an undefined dread of what might have happened below, she rushed to the door of her room, opened it, and then flew down the back staircase, reaching the study almost at the same moment as the butler, who had quickly answered his master's summons.

Never before had Claudia beheld her father with such an expression on his countenance as that which it wore when she met him at the door of his study—he was stern almost to fierceness, with a look of

excitement in his eyes which alarmed her. Mr. Hartswood did not appear to notice the presence of his daughter; in a voice hoarse and harsh with displeasure, he addressed himself to his startled servant: "How has this come about; how have thieves got entrance; how is it that I find the lock of my cabinet picked, my desk opened, my most valuable papers carried away?"

Garrard quailed before the stern questioning of his master; bewildered and surprised, he looked from side to side. The words which confused the servant had a more startling effect upon Claudia. A sudden terrible fear sent the blood to her heart, her hands and feet became icy cold, she leaned back against the wall, scarcely able to stand. Had Mr. Hartswood glanced at his daughter he could not but have been struck by her altered appearance, but he was not even aware that she was before him.

"Answer me directly," he continued, in tones raised yet louder; "have you seen any suspicious character lurking near the house?"

"No one, sir, no one," replied the servant nervously; "I shut the shutters myself as soon as I had taken in the dessert."

"Did you notice the state of that cabinet when you shut the shutters?" interrupted his master.

"I noticed nothing, sir; I did not look at the

cabinet; I thought all was locked up as it always is; you had been in the study yourself, sir, when you came in from the station."

"Thieves have been in this room since I was here," said Mr. Hartswood sternly; "I must have detectives down from London directly—I will telegraph up to the police-station." He turned, and striding up to the table on which lay his desk, hastily took up writing materials. "But first," continued the lawyer, with the undipped pen in his hand, "let every member of this household be summoned directly, that I may examine all, and find if possible some clue by which to track the burglars, and bring them to summary justice. If I find that there has been collusion—" Claudia could not catch the exact meaning of the muttered words that followed, but the lawyer's knitted brows and sternly compressed lips conveyed the inarticulate threat.

There was no need to summon the household; Mr. Hartswood's loud ringing and louder speaking had already brought every maid-servant into the passage, where Garrard already stood trembling; Claudia could hear the slight rustling and whispering as they came down the stairs. But what use could there be in questioning domestics? Claudia knew too well that she, and she only, held the clue to the maze; she knew too well that it was she

who should speak. The poor girl's heart throbbed violently, she felt like one forced to leap over a precipice, recoiling with unutterable terror from the brink, yet urged on by a fearful necessity, for silence now would be folly, and something worse.

"Oh, papa!" gasped out Claudia, clasping her hands, "I can tell something; I—I know who has been in this room," Claudia had followed her father into the study.

"You! what do you know?" asked the lawyer quickly. Claudia felt that his eyes were reading her through and through. She wished the servants to retire, but had not voice even to ask her father to send them away. Her dreaded confession must be made, and, to her confusion and shame, made in the presence of witnesses.

"Who has been here?" asked Mr. Hartswood, with utterance as rapid, but in tone less stern, for he saw that his daughter was trembling like an aspen before him.

"A young nun—"

"A nun!" ejaculated Mr. Hartswood, and the word was faintly echoed in tones of amazement by the maids in the passage, who now clustered more closely round the door.

"And how came she here?" asked the master abruptly.

"She was flying from her convent ; she had been cruelly wronged ; I meant, yes, indeed I meant to tell you all about her when we met in—"

Mr. Hartswood interrupted his daughter with the question, "Her name?" as he seated himself before his desk, and dipped his pen in the ink.

"Helena ; I am not sure of the surname, but she is niece of Lady Melton."

Mr. Hartswood started, and hastily glanced up into the face of his daughter, who had ventured to look at him as he bent over his desk. Their eyes met, and it was as if Claudia had received an electric shock, such a glance as that which she encountered had never rested on her before.

"Niece of Lady Melton," muttered Mr. Hartswood, as he rapidly wrote down something on the paper before him. The note was not a long one ; it was soon written, folded, enveloped, directed, and Mr. Hartswood motioned to Garrard to take it.

"Carry that at once to the convent ; be the Superior sleeping or waking it matters not, she must have it without a minute's delay. And stay, rouse Aytoun at the lodge, bid him come hither directly. I shall dispatch by him a telegram to London ; and he must go on the 'Crown' and order a conveyance to come here at once. I think that there is no night train after a quarter to ten." The lawyer glanced

at his watch, the hands pointed to five minutes to eleven.

"Wait for an answer to that note, Garrard," continued Mr. Hartswood; "insist on not returning without one." With an impatient gesture of the hand he dismissed his servant, and catching sight as he did so of the maids in the passage, in a stern tone of command he bade them retire, and then motioned to Claudia to close the door of the study. She was left alone with her father, a miserable culprit in presence of her judge, as she felt herself now to be.





CHAPTER XVI.

BITTER THOUGHTS.

MR. HARTSWOOD sternly pointed to a chair, Claudia rather sank than seated herself upon it.

The lawyer took a second piece of paper, to write on it the telegram which he was about to dispatch to the police authorities in London.

"Describe this nun," said he, dipping his pen ; "height?"

"About my own, a little shorter perhaps," the mouth of Claudia felt so parched from excitement that articulation cost her an effort.

"Dress? black, of course."

"No, blue," faltered out Claudia.

"Strange," muttered Mr. Hartswood, as he put down the word. "Material ; style?" he inquired in the same abrupt manner.

"You know, papa, my silk dress, the striped blue."

"Yours!" exclaimed the lawyer in angry sur-

prise; "and how came she to wear your silk dress?"

"I lent it, and the hat too." Claudia was unconsciously pressing the nails of her right hand so tightly into the flesh of her left arm, that her skin bore the mark for several days. The unhappy girl had to bear a series of questions with something of the emotions of a prisoner before the Inquisition—her feelings were stretched on the rack. Mr. Hartswood drew from Claudia every leading particular of her intercourse with Helena; he made no comment on the strange confession, and the only interruption to the painful examination was an occasional ejaculation of impatience from the lawyer at the tardiness of Garrard's return. If the period of his absence appeared long to Mr. Hartswood, to Claudia it seemed interminable; she scarcely knew why she should so long for an answer to her father's note from the Superior, but it was that the confession which she was making cost her such exquisite pain, that any kind of interruption would have been welcomed as a relief.

At last a break occurred; Aytoun, who had been roused by Garrard from the deep sleep of a labouring man, appeared at the door, his eyes still heavy with drowsiness. The gardener wondered what service could be required of him at the midnight hour, for Garrard had not stopped to explain when, as com-

manded, he had called at the lodge on his way to the convent.

"There is a telegram, take it to the station, see that it is instantly dispatched," said Mr. Hartswood, pushing towards Aytoun a paper on which he had written a description of Helena's appearance, and a demand that detectives might be sent down to Friern Hatch early in the morning; "then go on to the 'Crown' at B—— and order a chariot and pair to be here directly. I must go up to London at once."

"Oh, papa, can you not rest here to-night!" exclaimed Claudia, painfully struck by the pale, haggard appearance of her parent, now that the flush of angry excitement had passed away from his cheek.

"Rest," he muttered gloomily: "till I have recovered these papers there is no more rest for me."

Aytoun departed on his errands; Mr. Hartswood resumed his examination of his unhappy daughter, rapidly noting down her replies. At length the sound of creaking boots in the hall, and then the tap at the study door, told the return of Garrard.

Mr. Hartswood rose from his chair, went to the door himself, took a note from the hand of Garrard, and bade the butler retire and await his further orders. As the lawyer returned to his seat, he tore open the envelope of the Lady Superior, and then

throwing himself on his chair, he read half aloud part of the contents of her note.

"Begg to inform him that none of the sisters has broken her vows or forsaken her convent. There has never been one here of the name of Helena, nor any bearing the slightest relationship whatever to Lady Melton."

An exclamation of astonishment rose to the lips of Claudia, but she dared not give it utterance. Her father did not look surprised, but more sternly indignant than ever.

"As I suspected, a deep-laid plot to get hold of the papers," muttered the lawyer, rising and striding rapidly up and down the room with his hands behind him, and the Superior's note crushed in his grasp. "They might have tampered with my servants; but no, it was my daughter in whose credulity, folly, deceitfulness, they found a ready instrument to work the ruin of her father." Mr. Hartwood stopped in his rapid pacing to and fro directly in front of Claudia, on whom the last sentence had fallen like the stroke of a dagger. "Go to bed, child—go to bed," he said sternly; "there is no need for you to watch or to work; nothing that you can do can ever repair the mischief wrought by your folly."

Claudia would fain have thrown herself at the

feet of her almost idolized father, have wept and implored his forgiveness, but she had no power either to shed tears or to utter a word at that moment. Stricken, crushed, unutterably miserable, she could only obey. She found her way up the staircase, into her room, shut the door behind her, and locked it, then sank on her knees with a bitter, bitter cry, wrung from the heart's deep anguish, "Oh, that I could die—that I could die!" For some time Claudia's mind seemed unable to grasp any other idea, she was utterly bewildered by the suddenness of the blow which had come upon her so unexpected, and to her so strangely mysterious.

"What have I done!" exclaimed Claudia at last, springing to her feet, and pressing her clenched hands to her temples, as though to keep down the throbbings of her brain. "Am I the same Claudia as she who last entered this room, full of hope and pride, and the consciousness of a noble mission? What have I done," she repeated more wildly, "that my own father should taunt me with credulity, folly, deceit, when I meant to do what was right, to defend the oppressed, to oppose persecution, win a Romanist to give up her Popish delusions?" Claudia was in far too excited a state at that time to be able to analyze motives, or to come to a correct judgment either as regarded her own conduct or

that of others. That the pseudo-nun was an artful impostor Claudia no longer could doubt, though what her precise object had been in weaving so intricate a plot was a mystery still to her friend. Claudia but knew—and how mortifying was the knowledge!—that she who had prided herself on detecting the slightest taint of insincerity in those around her, and had regarded such a taint as fatal to friendship, had been herself led into practising arts of deception of which, but a few days before, she would have deemed herself quite incapable! How was it that everything relating to Helena now appeared to Claudia in a new light, that a bandage seemed to have been suddenly removed from her eyes, and that the very same course of action towards the nun which Claudia had persuaded herself to be right, she now confessed to have been altogether foolish and wrong?

About midnight Claudia heard the wheels of the carriage which came to take her father to London. Mr. Hartwood did not keep it two minutes waiting. His daughter, watching from the window, saw him depart with a sickening sense of loneliness. "He never bade me good-bye," she murmured; and then, at last, the hot drops gushed from her eyes. The night was far spent before Claudia even attempted to snatch a few hours of repose. Without taking

off the white muslin dress which she wore, the weary girl threw herself on her bed, and from sheer exhaustion fell into brief and feverish sleep, to awake with a crushing weight of fear and self-reproach on her heart.

An almost forgotten rhyme which had been read years before by Claudia, when she had not the faintest idea that it could apply to herself, haunted her memory now, like a straw whirled round on the eddies of some troubled water,—

“ Oh, theirs is peril to sadden the heart,
Peril the mind to harrow,
Who wander off on the broad, broad path,
Taking it for the narrow.”

The last line Claudia repeated over and over to herself. She recalled her own proud boast to Emma, uttered so short a time before, in full belief of its truth. “I am sure that I have not deceit in my heart, any more than on my lips or in my looks.” Now the poor girl more than suspected that she had been cherishing *heart-deceit* all along, that she had mistaken her own motives, mistaken her own character, mistaken the whole bent of her earthly career.

Has she whose eyes now glance over these pages ever given one quiet hour to reflection on what is her own guiding rule, her leading motive? Many

hours may have been spent in pleasant day-dreams, generous projects ; self-gratulation may have arisen from conscious superiority over others less high-minded and unworldly, but has the mirror of truth been faithfully held up to the soul ? Have we seen ourselves—do we wish to see ourselves—as we are in the sight of Him who searcheth the thoughts of the heart ? There is far more danger of our deceiving ourselves, than of our deceiving others ; it is possible even to believe that we are following the leading-star of duty, when our guide is our own self-will holding aloft a torch kindled by pride.





CHAPTER XVII.

THE VICARAGE.

“**I**F this Claudia Hartswood does not want our company, I am sure that we don’t want hers ; if she doesn’t care for us, we don’t care a straw for her !” exclaimed Harry Holder, as he leaned over the back of his sister’s chair, watching her fingers as she ran a string into a bag for his fishing-tackle ; “she’s but a lawyer’s daughter ; and I don’t like lawyers—they’re like pike in the river, getting fat by gobbling up all the smaller fry that can’t get out of their way.”

“There are honest lawyers,” observed Emma ; “and I’m certain, from what his daughter has told me, that he is one of them. As for Claudia herself, she is more high-minded—”

“Wheugh ! she’s mighty high,” said Harry with a sneer ; “you might tell that half a mile off by the way in which she walks, treading the grass as if she thought that daisies would spring up under her feet. She likes to live on the top of a hill, that she may

look down upon all the rest of the world ! That's not a lass to my mind," continued the boy, striking the floor with the handle of his fishing-rod ; " give me a sweet red strawberry, growing close to the ground, rather than the brownest acorn that ever swung on the topmost branch of a tree."

" But the strawberry will never grow into an oak," observed Emma Holder.

" No more will the acorn," laughed Harry, " unless it tumble down from its high bough, and hide itself low in the ground, lower than the strawberry under its leaves. But there—you've done—and I'm off ! Mother will be glad to get rid of my chatter ; her clothing-club list will be written down faster when I am out of the way."

Off ran Harry to join his brothers, whose loud merry voices were heard from the field behind the parsonage house. The boy in his haste almost knocked against his father the vicar, who at that moment entered the parlour, heated after his round of afternoon visits in the parish.

Mrs. Holder laid down her pen, closed her red-covered book, and greeted her husband with the placid good-humoured face like sunshine. " Well, my dear, you look tired," she observed ; " you must have found it hot in the sun. Have you heard any news in the village ?

Mr. Holder laid down his stick, took off his hat, and wiped his heated brow with his handkerchief; then glanced around to see that he had no auditors but his wife and Emma ere he replied.

“News?—yes, indeed; I’ve never been more astonished in my life. There was a robbery last night at Friern Hatch, while guests were dining in the house.”

The ladies both uttered exclamations, and drew their chairs nearer to that of which the vicar had taken possession. A burglary was happily so uncommon an event in the parish, that it was sure to excite curiosity and interest.

“Detectives were down by daybreak,” continued the vicar; “the criminal has not yet been taken up, though the police are hard on her track. Mr. Hartswood went up to town at midnight to help in tracing her.”

“*Her!*—surely the burglar is not a woman!” cried Emma.

“A woman—and a young and pretty one—who does not seem, as far as we can tell, to have had an accomplice,” resumed Mr. Holder. “For some days, it appears, a lady (so she called herself) has been lodging at Widow Bane’s, who lives, as every one knows, in the lane which divides the Friern Hatch grounds from the convent garden. This lady was—

or gave herself out to be—in delicate health, an invalid, nervous, and requiring change of air and quiet. She called herself Miss Leland, but it seems likely that she has half-a-dozen *aliases*, for she passed herself off to Claudia Hartswood as Sister Helena, a nun.”

“To Claudia Hartswood !” exclaimed Mrs. Holder and Emma in a breath ; “ what had Claudia to do with her ? ” added the former.

“ A great deal too much ; that is, to my mind, the worst part of the business,” said the vicar very gravely. “ This Miss Leland chose to remain very quiet, as she said, on account of her health, and cared to be seen by, or converse with, no one but her landlady, Mrs. Bane. This person recalls how her lodger drew from her every particular that she could gather regarding Friern Hatch and its inmates : you know that Mrs. Bane takes in their washing.”

“ I recommended her to Mr. Hartswood myself,” said Mrs. Holder ; “ I know her to be—”

“ Never mind the widow, my dear ; the question is not about her, but her lodger. This Miss Leland went out, as it appears, every day at a particular hour, always in the same direction, always with a large black bag, which she said contained a rug for her feet and materials for sketching, as she was

taking a view of the convent. It is clear that this bag must have contained something very different from rug, paint-box, or brushes, for this same bag has been found, with all a nun's paraphernalia, black robe, veil, rosary, crucifix and all, in a little green bower in the shrubbery at the end of the Friern Hatch grounds."

"Claudia's bower," ejaculated Emma.

"But I can't understand the drift of all this," said the vicar's wife; "all seems so meaningless and confused. This woman, this Miss Leland, might have disguised herself as a nun, had she wished to steal into the convent; but how such a dress could possibly aid her in getting into a lawyer's house, passes my poor comprehension."

"It enabled her in some extraordinary way to gain an influence over his daughter."

"Oh no, papa!" exclaimed Emma, with animation; "that is really impossible. Claudia told me herself, when I passed some hours with her last Monday, that her father had forbidden her to have anything to do with the nuns of the convent."

"It is not of what Miss Claudia said, but of what she did that I was speaking," observed Mr. Holder drily.

"Is it possible Claudia could say one thing and do another?" cried Emma, who could scarcely believe

that Mr. Hartswood's high-souled daughter could prove so false.

"I fear that she is a sadly unprincipled, deceitful girl," was the reply of the vicar. "Unknown to her father, Claudia has, by her own confession, carried on secret communication with this Miss Leland, whom she supposed to be one of the nuns from the convent. Miss Hartswood has met the impostor, I know not how often, in that bower at the end of the grounds; they were there together yesterday, twice at least."

Emma's countenance fell; she remembered Claudia's confusion when she had met her in the shrubbery, her expressed desire to spend the morning *alone*. Emma was astonished and shocked at the duplicity of a girl whom she had deemed so truthful; bitter is the moment when a young heart first finds that it has been deceived in one whom it had admired, loved, and trusted.

"This is not all," continued the vicar; "this wretched Claudia actually smuggled Miss Leland into the house, and left her in the study of Mr. Hartswood, where the impostor, supplied with pick-locks, made but too good use of her time. Claudia never so much as threw out a hint of the presence of a stranger in the dwelling, till she found that the

pseudo-nun had disappeared, carrying with her property of the utmost value."

"Silver plate and money, no doubt," observed the practical Mrs. Holder.

"No ; papers," replied the vicar.

"Unless they were bank-notes, one cannot see of what use such things could be to a burglar," said the lady. "Well, well, I'm sure, what a world it is that we live in. Who ever would have guessed that that frank, bright, open-hearted girl, as she seemed, would have acted a part so disgraceful !"

"We cannot be too thankful that Claudia's character has been found out, before she had had time to form a closer intimacy with our dear child," observed the vicar, looking tenderly at Emma, whose eyes were filling with tears.

"It is an escape—a merciful escape !" exclaimed the indignant mother. "One never knows what deceitful notions might be put into the brain of an unsuspecting girl like our Emma. This lawyer's daughter ; well used, no doubt, to tricks and quibbles—"

"My dear, my dear !" expostulated the vicar.

"Oh, mamma, I could never learn from Claudia anything of deceit, but hatred of it," cried Emma. "I never met with any one—not even yourself—with such a high, such a very high standard of truthfulness."

The vicar shook his head very gravely. "Character is a plant of slow growth," he observed; "it is impossible that such duplicity as that shown by this unhappy girl should have sprung up in a day, a week, or a month. The more plausible such a companion may be, the more dangerous her influence must prove."

Mrs. Holder's maid-servant entered the parlour with a little three-cornered note, which she gave to Emma, who recognized the handwriting of Claudia. The contents of the note were brief. "Dear Emma—I am lonely. Do come over to your's affectionately, C. H."

"Miss Hartwood's maid waits for an answer," said the servant.

Emma silently handed the note to her mother, who read and passed it on to the vicar, while the servant quitted the room.

"What am I to reply?" asked Emma.

"Certainly decline going," answered the vicar.

"There are paper and pens," said Mrs. Holder, pointing to the table which she had just quitted; "the sooner your note is sent off the better."

"But what excuse can I possibly make?" asked Emma, as slowly and reluctantly she went to the table.

"No excuse is needed under circumstances like

the present," said the vicar. "Write that you regret that you are prevented from going. Miss Hartswood is quite intelligent enough to understand what it is that prevents you."

"I am astonished, after what has occurred, that Claudia should have the face to send an invitation to my daughter!" exclaimed Mrs. Holder.

Emma, slowly and sadly, commenced her note. "Poor Claudia will be dreadfully hurt," she murmured, and a long sigh followed, which was partly for the mortification which she knew that her refusal would inflict on her late friend, partly on account of her own disappointment.

"Stop; do not address her as 'Dear Claudia,' " said Mrs. Holder, who had risen from her seat, and was looking over her daughter's shoulder as she wrote. "I will have no such terms of familiarity between my child and Miss Hartswood."

The stiff formal note was soon written and despatched. Emma felt as she traced the cold lines that she was breaking the link which bound her to Claudia, and a sore pang it cost her to do so. As soon as the note was sent, Emma ran up to her own little room and gave way to a burst of tears. This did not last long, for the busy life passed at the vicarage afforded little time for the indulgence of tender emotions; but when Emma joined the next social

meal, her merry, noisy brothers, almost for the first time found their sister ill-tempered. Emma could hardly endure to hear their boyish remarks on the affair at Friern Hatch, of which they, like all the rest of those who lived near it, were full; and it was soon discovered at the vicarage that the way to stir up the gentle Emma to anger, was to abuse one whom her affectionate spirit would fain still have regarded as a model of honour and candour.





CHAPTER XVIII.

SEARCH FOR A CLUE.



THAT short note which had cost tears to her who had penned it, was to her who received it like vinegar poured on an open wound.

"*Sincerely yours* ; yes, sincerely indeed," muttered Claudia bitterly, as she tossed the letter away in disgust. "Emma cannot at least be accused of flattering the fallen, or of feigning friendship for one who will certainly never stoop to ask for a proof of it from her again."

It had been the almost insupportable sense of loneliness in her trouble which had induced Claudia, after much hesitation, to ask the vicar's daughter to come. The life of Claudia had hitherto been one of almost unclouded enjoyment. The darling of a fondly loved father, possessing every comfort and advantage which his affection could secure to his child, with buoyant spirits, high health, and a keen enjoyment for intellectual pursuits, Claudia's life

had been like a morning in May. She had had no cares, no fears, no pain, and scarcely the shadow of a trouble. The storm of affliction had burst on her suddenly, and had found her quite unprepared to meet it. Claudia knew not whither to turn for shelter or comfort. She who had been proudly conscious of strength and courage, and had been sometimes almost eager to have them brought to the test, felt her strength fail and her courage shrink in her first encounter with misfortune. But it had come to the proud girl in a shape most unexpected and most distressing.

Early in the morning Claudia had had to endure the ordeal of an interview with the detectives from London, and to impart to them all the information which she could give regarding the pseudo-nun. The pain, the mortification which the high-spirited girl had endured in relating to men and strangers the story of her own duplicity and folly, may readily be imagined. If her anguish had been keener when making her confession to her father, her humiliation was now deeper. This painful but necessary interview over, Claudia was left to solitude and to her own reflections, which were sufficiently bitter. Never had time appeared to Claudia to move at a pace so slow. She could settle to no occupation, every one had become distasteful. When

she opened a book, her mind did not take in the sense of the words on which her eyes rested ; they might have been Hebrew, for aught that she knew. When Claudia attempted to write, she soon threw down her pen in despair. She had delighted to ramble alone in the shrubbery, listen to the warble of birds and the gurgle of the brook, and indulge in delicious musings ; but now all her musings were painful, and she turned with aversion from every spot connected in her mind with the faithless Helena. The black form seemed to haunt the bower ; to throw a shadow over the brook. Claudia shrank even from entering her father's study, from the bitter associations which the sight of the once delightful little room now raised in her mind. Unable, at last, longer to endure this sense of isolation and depression, which she thought would drive her to distraction, Claudia had penned her short note to Emma ; the answer to which had poured an additional drop of gall into a cup already overflowing.

Claudia's self-reproach was something distinct from repentance. The former is so often mistaken for the latter, that it is well to examine into the difference between them. Claudia's spirit was, save during the interview with her father, rather soured than subdued ; she was angry indeed with herself,

but rather for her blindness and credulity, her failure in detection of fraud, than from any conviction of moral error. She was far more angry with the impostor who had deceived, and even with the friend who, as she deemed, had forsaken her. There was still with the lawyer's daughter an attempt at self-justification, a desire to excuse her own conduct, and to regard herself as one led astray by her generous impulses, and far more sinned against than sinning. Claudia was grieved at having offended her earthly parent; she scarcely asked herself whether she had also incurred the displeasure of her heavenly Father. She winced under the consciousness that her conduct had been unworthy of herself; the thought scarcely crossed her mind that it had been unworthy of a Christian. There was something of pride and selfishness in Claudia's sorrow, as there had been in her efforts to do good. Her heart might be deeply wounded, but it was not a *broken and contrite heart*.

Claudia longed for, yet dreaded, her father's return from London. The familiar sound of the railway-whistle at the hour when she expected him home, gave her a shivering sensation of fear. The poor girl did not go forth, as usual, to meet her father, at or beyond the gate of the drive; she remained in the dining-room awaiting his coming.

But in vain she listened for the sound of the click of the gate, or that of the quick firm step on the gravel. Claudia remained standing in the attitude of listening intently, till Garrard entered the room with the matter-of-fact question: "As master has not come by this train, miss, what had better be done about dinner?"

"Let it be kept back till he does come," said Claudia; "the night train comes in two hours hence."

"But you," began the butler, who had removed the mid-day meal almost untasted by his young mistress.

"I will wait; I care not!" replied Claudia impatiently, turning away to the window.

Two more dreary hours of sickening expectation passed slowly with Claudia. The sun set in a thick bank of clouds, dull twilight came prematurely on, preceding a moonless and starless night. Claudia spent her waiting-time by the window, watching the deepening gloom, and wondering what tidings her father would bring. She was faint and sick with unwonted fasting; and the darkness of outer Nature seemed to rest on her soul like a pall. It was a relief to hear at last the panting of the coming train, which, through the night stillness, sounded to Claudia like the violent throbbing of a heart. Then

there was the shrill piercing whistle ; the train was reaching the station. This time the weary watcher was not to be disappointed. Claudia ran forth to meet her father, saw his form approaching through the darkness, and in silence parent and child embraced—there was no cheerful greeting between them. Mr. Hartswood's daughter dared ask no questions ; she felt convinced that he brought no good tidings, or they would have been imparted at once. The lawyer's manner was not unkind, but gloomy and abstracted ; and Claudia could hear a weary sigh as he crossed the threshold of his home.

During the first part of the cheerless meal which ensued, scarcely a word was uttered ; the presence of Garrard behind his master's chair acted as a restraint. When Claudia ventured timidly to steal a glance at her father, she thought that the lines of care and age had never before appeared so distinct on his face ; it grieved her soul to see them. When Garrard had left the room, Mr. Hartswood, who had been taking his meal with an air of abstraction, began to give his daughter the information for which she was pining, but for which she had not ventured to ask. The lawyer spoke, as it were, by snatches, in a quick abrupt manner, very different from his usual pleasant confidential way of conversing with his child.

"No clue found yet. I've advertised largely. Placards are already over half London."

Again there was an interval of silence, while Mr. Hartwood refilled his glass, and drained it.

"There is no lady of the name of Irvine to be found in Grosvenor Square, nor has any such person been in the habit of visiting St. George's Hospital. Such an artfully spun web of deceit I have scarcely met with during the whole course of my practice."

Another pause, which Claudia feared to break. Again her father spoke, but scarcely as if addressing his daughter.

"I was for more than an hour to-day with Lady Melton. She has no female relative in the world, nor knew that there was a convent near us. She is furiously indignant and angry."

"At Miss Lelands passing herself off as her niece?" asked Claudia; she could not bring herself to utter the name "Helena."

"No; at the loss of the papers, of course," replied Mr. Hartwood sharply. "It will be impossible to bring on her suit until those documents be recovered. I have offered a very large reward; recover them we must and shall, were I to sell my last spoon to cover expenses."

"May not those who are interested in stopping the suit be those who have got possession of the

papers?" suggested Claudia. "No common thief would care to carry them off. Against whom was Lady Melton going to bring this suit?"

"The person in possession of the large estate on which Lady Melton has a claim is a Sir Edmund Curtis," said the lawyer. "Sir Edmund is a man of property and position, one whose character stands high in the world; he is one most unlikely to be involved in a hazardous plot to commit a robbery, however advantageous to his interests its result—if successful—might prove."

"If the crime was not committed from motives of interest, might it not have been from motives of malice or revenge?" suggested Claudia. "Does Lady Melton know of any one who bears her ill-will?"

On any other occasion Mr. Hartswood might have been pleased and amused at his daughter's shrewd conjectures, and have laughingly exclaimed, as he had done so often before, that it was a pity that she could not be called to the bar. But not a smile rose to his lips as the lawyer replied: "The same idea presented itself to my mind, and I suggested it to my client. Lady Melton informed me in reply, that, about a year ago, she had dismissed from her house at an hour's notice a person who had been in her full confidence as a humble com-

panion, but who, as she accidentally discovered, had secured the situation by false references, and whose antecedents had been such as to render her ineligible to hold it. Lady Melton was astonished to find that this Miss Eagle, who had represented herself as a clergyman's daughter, had been an actress by profession."

"That's Helena!" ejaculated Claudia; "for never was there a being who could act a part better than she."

"You have come to too hasty a conclusion," said the lawyer. "Of course I closely questioned Lady Melton as to this lady-companion, comparing her description of Miss Eagle with that of Miss Leland, *alias* Helena. It is quite impossible that the two should be identical: Miss Eagle is half a head taller than the nun, and is at least twenty years older; her nose is hooked, while, by your own account, Miss Leland's is straight. They may both be actresses, indeed, but are certainly not the same individuals."

"The whole affair is so mysterious, so utterly inexplicable," sighed Claudia.

"It is a dark labyrinth of iniquity, which must be explored in its every winding," muttered the lawyer under his breath. "No labour or expense shall be spared on my part; for where papers of the utmost value, intrusted to my charge, have been

abstracted from my own cabinet in this most unaccountable way, something more than my professional reputation for discretion and carefulness is involved." And Mr. Hartswood fell into a train of gloomy, silent thought, which lasted till he retired to his room for the night.





CHAPTER XIX.

RUMOURS AND SUSPICIONS.



NE shock of an earthquake may rend a fragment of marble from its crag, but it requires many a stroke of the chisel to form the marble into a statue. It is generally the gradual and almost imperceptible effect of the instruments of which God is pleased to make use, that moulds the characters of those whom he makes his own. The first great misfortune which Claudia had felt (for she had been too young when her mother had died to know grief for her loss), had been to her like the earthquake; but the prolonged trials that succeeded, like the successive blows of the chisel, were the means of making a more permanent and marked change than any single shock could have done.

Painfully and slowly passed day after day, week after week. Notwithstanding the most strenuous efforts of Mr. Hartswood, no trace of Helena could be discovered. The guard of the night-train by

which she had travelled up to London remembered, indeed, a lady, young and pretty, dressed in blue silk, with a broad-brimmed hat, who had declined his offer to procure for her a cab upon her arrival at the station, and, to his surprise, had walked away, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, without any protection. The evidence of the guard was as a single footprint left on sand, no second one could be found ; it was as if the pseudo-nun had vanished into thin air. Money was lavished, time was spent in the search for the stolen papers, but all with no result save that of deepening disappointment. Every evening Mr. Hartswood returned to his home, grave, stern, and irritable. Cares were heavily pressing upon him. The lawyer had always lived up to, sometimes beyond his professional income ; borne on the tide of prosperity, he had looked forward to increasing business with increasing reputation ; but the strange loss of the documents belonging to the most important case in which he was engaged, had seriously affected both. Rumours were circulated, whispers went round in clubs and fashionable circles regarding the robbery at Friern Hatch, injurious to the character of Mr. Hartswood. The effect of this was soon seen. No new briefs were placed in the lawyer's hands ; professional advice was sought from those whom he knew to be greatly his inferiors in

father ; never again could that boast be uttered. It became more and more a hopeless task to attempt to please him ; almost every sentence which broke from his lips inflicted a pang on his sensitive daughter. She dreaded the sight of notes in Lady Melton's familiar handwriting ; Mr. Hartswood always took them up with a frown on his brow, and the furrow was certain to deepen as he perused them. He became—what he never had been in former days—impatient, unreasonable, almost tyrannical with his servants. Garrard was given warning for some trifling act of neglect ; the month's bills, though not larger than usual, caused the discharge of the cook. Mr. Hartswood was incensed by any heavy draw on his purse, and yet almost equally so if any change appeared in

the routine of household arrangements. Claudia could not but see that her father was an altered man; she was miserable at the change, and yet had to struggle to keep up a calm and even cheerful demeanour; for if tears should start to her eyes, or even if her manner should betray depression, Mr. Hartswood's irritation was visibly increased. It was only during the hours of her father's absence that the poor girl dared give way to her grief, and then many were the tears which fell over the pages of the Bible, to which she now turned for the comfort which she could find in nothing besides.

For the discipline of affliction was gradually subduing the proud spirit of Claudia Hartswood. She was at first conscious of having made one serious mistake, which was drawing on her a punishment which seemed to her greater than the offence, but she was now beginning to suspect that her whole previous life might have been a mistake. Claudia had looked upon herself as the victim of a heartless piece of deception; now she was gradually led to fear that deceit had been harboured in her own breast. She had followed her own pleasure, indulged her own will, and had then complacently regarded herself as doing the bidding and forwarding the work of her heavenly Master. Claudia had placed much

reliance on her own mental powers, but what had they availed in time of temptation! Imagination, the mental eye, had been deceived by the mirage raised by the spirit of romance. Judgment, discernment, had been grievously at fault, perverted by vanity and pride. Claudia had suffered her moral perceptions to be confused by "the musk odour of deceit." She had sought for no wisdom from above, nor—till this time of humiliation—had realized that a need for it existed.

The painful state into which Claudia had now entered was rather one of preparation than of a new spiritual life. It was as the ploughing up of the weed-tangled ground, not the springing up of the heavenly seed. There are some proud spirits that, like Hagar, must be led step by step farther into the desert, before they hear the voice of the angel. Their skin-bottle of earthly pleasure has to be emptied out, drop by drop, ere they find—or even seek for—the life-giving spring which time can never exhaust.

The summer was one of exquisite beauty, but to Claudia, in her deep depression, Nature itself had lost half its charms. She could not take her former interest in the parterres, for her father now never looked at the flowers. Claudia wandered about the grounds listlessly, almost envying Emma

Holder her troublesome pupils and her homely employments, idleness was so oppressive ; but Claudia, without the necessity, had not the heart for work.

The anniversary of Claudia's birth-day arrived ; it was one which had always been remembered and kept, but now for the first time it appeared to be forgotten by all but her who, on that day, completed her sixteenth year. There was no tempting-looking parcel on her toilette-table, with loving words written upon it in the handwriting of her fond father ; nor, when Mr. Hartwood met his daughter at breakfast, was there any allusion to what he had been wont to call "this auspicious day." Claudia missed the blessing, the smile, the cordial good wish which had never been wanting before. Her father was occupied with his own gloomy thoughts, and to the anxious eye of affection looked aged and ill. Twice he spoke to Claudia with peevish impatience ; he complained of the heat of the weather, and of the fatigue and inconvenience of daily journeys by train after being exposed to the stifling atmosphere of law-courts. Mr. Hartwood had never till recently been wont to complain of anything ; Claudia had once laughingly observed that her father looked at life through glasses *couleur de rose*, now everything seemed to be viewed by him through a curtain of crape.

Mr. Hartswood went off to London, and Claudia, left to solitude, sauntered wearily under the shade of the trees, absorbed in bitter reflections.

"How different were my feelings," thought she, "when I last reached one of life's mile-stones, and looked forward with eager hope on the unknown future before me! I remember the proud consciousness of talent, energy, and resolute will, with which I wrote in my journal: 'This world is full of sham, humbug, and deceit—the mission of every true-hearted woman is to expose, resist, and overcome it.' I, alas! have mistaken my mission, or have failed to fulfil it. I have been both deceived and deceiver. I have disappointed alike my father's expectations and my own. I have proved weak where I deemed myself to be strong. I seem to have advanced in nothing, unless it be in experience, bitter experience; and oh, for that what a price have I paid!"

Claudia's steps had brought her near the side-door at which the postman was leaving part of the contents of his bag. Claudia had not noticed his coming, for a screen of laurels was between them, and was only made aware of it by her casually overhearing part of a sentence spoken to the postman by Garrard as he took in the letters.

"Say what you like, I can't believe that master put our young miss up to—"

To what? Claudia did not wait to hear the end of the sentence, she was above the meanness of eaves-dropping, and instantly turned from the spot; but those few words which her ear had caught opened to her a new and painful field for thought. What could be inferred from such words? Was it possible that any one could for a moment suspect that her father, her noble father, had been an accomplice in the abduction of the property of his client! The mere idea of such a suspicion flushed the cheek of his daughter, and she threw it indignantly from her mind, but had no power to prevent its return.

Claudia went back to the house, and met Garrard bringing in the papers, and a single note addressed to herself in the handwriting of Annie Goldie. It was long since Claudia had heard from her former companion, and welcome was the sight of the familiar hand, which showed that by one friend at least in her loneliness she was remembered. Claudia took the note and the newspaper into the study, sat down, and opened Annie's epistle. Displeasure darkened her countenance as she perused the contents; the following portion was read with indignant surprise :—

“ All sorts of disagreeable things are said, but, of course, I don't believe them; I am sure that your

father is *not* in league with Sir E. C. But I'm dying to know the whole story from beginning to end from yourself."

Claudia tore the note into fragments. "She is certainly likely to die before I stoop to gratify her impertinent curiosity," muttered the lawyer's daughter; and she took up the newspaper to divert her own thoughts from the subject.

But here, again, Claudia was met by the same haunting theme. The first portion of the paper upon which her eyes fell was one of those paragraphs which are often inserted to fill up vacant corners, and at the same time gratify the taste of the public for gossip:—

"THE VANISHED NUN.—All efforts to trace the mysterious individual who is alleged to have carried off valuable documents from a cabinet have proved ineffectual, and we may say in the words of Shakespeare,—

'The earth hath bubbles, as the water hath,
And this is of them.'

"The whole story of a supposed nun being concealed by a young lady in her father's study, while he was actually in the house—and of her being given a quiet opportunity of examining the contents of his cabinet, and selecting from his papers documents bearing on a case involving a quarter of

a million sterling—and then disappearing with her spoil unquestioned and unseen, like some invisible agent, bears on its face such strong features of improbability, that no skilful writer of fiction would venture on weaving such a plot. We can therefore only credit the tale on the plea that ‘truth is stranger than fiction,’ though we reprobate the spirit of gossip which would trifle with the reputation of a gentleman of high social position, and a distinguished member of an honourable profession.”

The paper dropped from the hands of Claudia. The dreadful suspicion awakened by the words of Garrard, and strengthened by the note of Annie, was now fully confirmed by the paragraph just perused. Slander had dared to breathe on the hitherto untarnished name of her father—he was actually suspected of having invented an improbable tale to account for the disappearance of papers placed under his care. The cause of the irritability, the depression of Mr. Hartwood, was now but too evident to his daughter; that reputation which was dearer to him than fortune, or life itself, was imperilled, and through the folly, the presumption, the deceitfulness of his daughter. With agony of spirit Claudia recalled the words of her parent on the terrible night of the first disclosure: “Nothing that you can do can ever repair the mischief wrought

by your folly." Claudia's soul was like a lake over which a tempest is sweeping. Honour, reputation, fair fame had appeared to her, as to her father, as of all things the most precious. To preserve them she would have sacrificed pleasure, profit, health, and have deemed the sacrifice made to a sense of duty. Claudia had formed a kind of religion out of her pride. With fierce, passionate resentment the injured girl now thought of Helena. The only relief from self-reproach was found in casting the reproach on the tempter.

"Viper—serpent—that I have warmed in my bosom, that it should sting my heart!" exclaimed Claudia, passionately, wringing her hands. "But she will not always escape from just retribution. vengeance will overtake her at last—the wrong will one day be righted—my father's character will again stand spotless and bright in the sight of the world! But oh! in the meantime what may not he—what may not I have to suffer! And it is only just that I should suffer; the deceiver could have had no power to betray had I—wretched that I am—but obeyed my parent and distrusted myself!" The shivering sigh which followed told of the anguish of a soul tortured by unavailing regrets for the past and gloomy fears for the future.



CHAPTER XX.

A MOVE.



HE miseries of that birth-day had not yet reached their climax.

Before noon the melancholy solitude of Claudia was disturbed by the entrance of Garrard. He was the bearer of a telegram which a messenger had just brought from the station. A flash of hope brightened the gloom of Claudia.

"The papers are found!" she exclaimed, as, starting up from her seat, she snatched the missive from the salver on which it was brought, and eagerly tore the envelope open. But her flash of hope was transient as the gleam of summer light which plays amid clouds. The telegram was from a Mr. Paley, whose name was familiar to Claudia, as he had long acted as clerk to her father. The message which it contained ran thus:—

"Mr. Hartswood was taken ill in Court to-day. He is now at my lodging in 2 Little Bread Court, Gray's Inn Lane."

Claudia uttered no exclamation ; she only trembled and turned very pale. This was, she felt, a time for action and not lamentation. She knew not of what nature or what gravity her father's illness might be, she but knew that her post must be by his side.

"Garrard, my father is ill—I must go to London directly ; when does the next train pass ?" she inquired with assumed composure.

"There will be one in half an hour," answered Garrard.

"Ring for Martha, she must accompany me to town," said Claudia, as she quitted the study to make preparation for so hasty a journey. She was surprised at the calmness with which she was able to make arrangements and give directions. As Mr. Hartswood's illness might be tedious, and such as to prevent his return to the country, Claudia had her desk and some few necessities packed to take with her, and also various articles which the invalid might require. It was some comfort to Claudia thus to think for and act for her parent ; the necessity for exercising consideration and foresight prevented the burden of anxiety from being so overwhelming as it would otherwise have proved. Claudia dared not let her mind dwell on the terrible fear of what might await her on her arrival in London, until she found

herself, with Martha beside her, seated in the train which would bear her thither.

Two gentlemen were Claudia's fellow-passengers in the railway-carriage. They appeared to be jovial sporting characters, and a mingled scent of tobacco and brandy which pervaded the carriage, and the free stare with which they surveyed the young lady as she entered, gave Claudia a feeling of repulsion. With the maidenly dignity and sense of propriety which Miss Hartswood already possessed, she kept perfectly quiet in her corner of the carriage, looking out on the landscape, and not even exchanging a word with the servant beside her. But Claudia could not avoid hearing the conversation passing between her fellow-travellers, who chatted gaily with each other, as if no one else were present.

"Look ye, Tom," said one of them to his companion, glancing out of the window; "that old house on the hill yonder is Friern Hatch, the scene of that odd affair about the mysterious nun."

Claudia felt exceedingly uncomfortable, and wished herself a thousand miles off.

The other young man laughed. "Such a rare bit of good luck for the Curtises!" he said, stroking his long moustaches. "The old cove has one foot in the grave, so it don't matter much to him, but his son—who's well known on the course—won't

think half a million or so a thing to be sneezed at. Jack Curtis never gained so much by any throw of the dice as he did by the carrying off of these papers. Ha, ha, ha ! it was a rare bit of luck ! ”

“ If it can be called luck,” observed the other, shrugging his shoulders. “ Thieves don’t usually carry off deeds or letters to make thread-papers or kite-tails. If I were Lady Melton, with half a million of money at stake, I’d not take the matter quietly.”

“ She does not take the matter quietly,” rejoined the other ; “ they say the old lady’s furious, and that it’s as likely as not that she’ll prosecute the fellow who so strangely let her property slip through his fingers.”

Claudia could scarcely sit still. Had the conversation between the two young men not taken a different turn, she must have betrayed herself by her emotion. It was unendurable to hear strangers thus playing with the reputation of her father, at a time too when she was in an agony of suspense lest she should find that beloved parent dying.

After the peaceful seclusion of the country, the noise, the bustle, the confusion of the great city after her arrival at the London station were especially trying to Claudia. Her impatience to reach her father was intense, and the slow pace of a lame cab-

horse, and then a dead-lock amongst carts and waggon, which lasted for several minutes, increased to a painful degree the irritation of her nervous system. The atmosphere of London felt so thick, the heat so oppressive, that the poor girl could not breathe freely, and her temples throbbed with violent pain.

At length the cab reached the place of its destination, turning into a narrow stone-paved court, which was near enough to a noisy thoroughfare for its rattle and noise to sound like a perpetual fall of water; yet in itself so dreary and dull that it looked to Claudia the very image of desolation. Small, square, dusty-paned windows from either side looked out on the narrow court. Sickly blades of grass—rather gray than green—grew here and there between the stones with which it was paved; there were a few lilac and privet shrubs in the centre, with soot-blackened stems and shrivelled leaves, that seemed as if they had never felt the pure breath of spring, nor caught a sunbeam from the strip of smoky sky above them. View there was none, save of dirty brick houses surmounted by dirtier stacks of chimnies; living creature there was none to be seen, but two dingy sparrows, that must have found their way by mistake into the centre of that prison-like enclosure of brick buildings. Claudia

had little time or inclination to look around her, but in a single glance took in a photograph-like impression of the dreariness of the court.

There was a dulness in the very tinkle of the bell, whose rusty handle appeared by the dark heat-blistered door of the house at which the cab had now stopped. Claudia could not wait till the driver's summons was answered, she sprang impatiently from the conveyance, and herself repeated the ring. The door was presently opened, creaking as if unwilling to admit a visitor, by the landlady of the lodging. The woman's appearance was forbidding: a greasy black cap, trimmed with faded red flowers, surmounted an untidy mass of iron-gray ringlets. Mrs. Maul's mouth was large, her under jaw protruded, ill-temper was stamped on her face.

"My father, Mr. Hartswood, is he here?" gasped Claudia, trying to read in the face of the woman whether dangerous illness—whether death might not be in that sombre dwelling.

"Yes, he's here; Mr. Paley, my lodger, brought him here; he'd had a kind of fit, but he's come round again," replied the landlady drily, no look of sympathy for the agitated girl softening her hard smoke-dried features. "If you want to see Mr. Hartswood, he's on the first-floor, and I'll show you."

But Claudia did not wait to be shown up-stairs ; she sprang past Mrs. Maul, and in two seconds was on the landing-place, with her trembling fingers on the handle of the door of the room occupied by her father. She turned that handle softly, for she feared to startle the invalid, or awaken him perhaps from slumber, and entered the apartment with noiseless step. To her unutterable relief Claudia saw her parent seated by a table, and, as appeared at first glance, looking much the same as when he had quitted home in the morning. Mr. Hartswood was surprised and annoyed at the entrance of his daughter.

"What on earth brings you here?" uttered in a harsh, almost angry tone, was the lawyer's welcome to Claudia.

"Dear papa, Mr. Paley telegraphed to me that you were ill."

"Paley's an old idiot; I wish that he would mind his own business," interrupted Mr. Hartswood. "I'm as well as ever I was in my life. It was but a little dizziness." The lawyer put his hand to his brow, and Claudia observed that there was something strange and almost wild in the expression of his eyes, which made her feel very uneasy.

"I daresay that the sweet country air," she

began ; but Mr. Hartswood abruptly cut short her sentence.

"Sweet country fiddlestick !" he exclaimed. "I'm not going back to Friern Hatch. These journeys to and fro are what kill me. I've told Mrs.—what's her name—that as these rooms are vacant, I mean to stop here."

"Not here surely, papa," said Claudia, glancing round the apartment, which, with its dingy curtains, faded carpet, and old horse-hair chairs, looked to her extremely uninviting.

"Yes, here," replied Mr. Hartswood, striking the floor with his foot; "I can't afford lodgings that might suit your fine taste, and I'll not stir a step from London till—till I've recovered these papers!" He ground his teeth as he ended the sentence, and his eyes looked more wild than before.

"If you stay, I hope that you will let me stay with you," said Claudia faintly.

"You can do as you like about that; I can't afford to keep up two establishments. I must sublet the Hatch, if I can; but, of course, you may prefer staying amongst your laurels and roses till I get a tenant," replied Mr. Hartswood. His tone conveyed a sneer.

"I would rather keep beside you, papa, wherever

you choose to be," said Claudia. "If you permit, I will speak to the landlady about it at once."

Claudia pulled the faded bell-rope, as her father's silence spoke his consent. Mr. Hartswood rose, and with a step far less firm and elastic than had been his six weeks before, entered his sleeping apartment, which was divided by folding-doors from that in which he had been sitting.

With feelings of sickening depression, Claudia held a brief colloquy with Mrs. Maul. The ill-tempered landlady seemed to be little disposed to make matters smooth for the poor young lady who had come to dwell under her roof. Her house was full enough already, she said—she did not care to have lady-lodgers—Mr. Paley had the ground-floor, Mr. Hartswood the first-floor—she and her family filled up every other part of the house. There was, indeed, a back attic, if that would do for the young miss; but as for her fine lady's-maid, there was not a corner in which she could be put up; Polly (the landlady's general servant) did everything lodgers could require.

A short time previously it would have appeared to Claudia almost impossible to have existed in such a prison as this lodging-house in Little Bread Court. But her spirit was humbled, her pride subdued, and care for personal comfort was almost lost in anxiety


on account of her father. Claudia at once closed with the offer of the attic. "Anything, any place, is good enough for me," was her silent reflection, as she followed Mrs. Maul up a steep and carpetless staircase, after desiring that her maid might carry up thither the parcels which she had brought.





CHAPTER XXI.

THE COURT.

“H Miss Hartswood, this is not a fit place for you!” was the exclamation of the astonished lady’s-maid, as she entered the wretched little apartment of which her young mistress was taking possession.

Mrs. Maul, who, with some difficulty, had passed Martha and her crinoline on the narrow staircase, overheard the exclamation, and the landlady’s disagreeable face wore a sneer as she muttered half aloud, “Them grand lady’s-maids as are always turning up their noses at what is good enough for their betters, end in a workhouse at last.”

But Martha might well be pardoned for criticizing the attic-room in Little Bread Court. The apartment was small and close, and seemed all the smaller and closer for having been apparently the lumber-room for empty boxes and all kinds of rubbish, amongst them worn-out brooms and a broken coal-scuttle. The plaster was peeling from the sloping

sides of the ceiling, owing to the extreme heat of a room situated just under the slates upon which the hot summer sun glowed fiercely. The furniture of the room looked as if it had been picked up in some low pawnbroker's shop. Dust lay thickly upon chest and chair, upon the soiled patchwork of the coverlet, and over the stained and uneven floor.

"I have no choice for to-night, Martha," replied Claudia Hartwood, "for my father will not quit this lodging to-day; and while he is so unwell I could not bear to leave him alone. Just see if you cannot open that window, and let in a breath of fresh air."

"It will hardly be *fresh* air," thought Martha, as she pulled and strained at the sash, which, if it had been made to open at all, appeared very unwilling to do so. The maid succeeded at last in raising the sash about two inches, and then surveyed her fingers blackened with dust and soot, with a disgust which she scarcely concealed.

"I hope that I shall persuade papa to return to Friern Hatch to-morrow," said Claudia; "in the meantime, I must not mind a little discomfort."

Claudia wearily seated herself on a broken-backed chair—she felt sick from anxiety and the close musty heat of the place. Her temples throbbed and ached, so that it was a painful effort even to keep

How often were Claudia's prayers to be repeated with yet more earnest devotion in that dreary, comfortless abode, for her hope that her sojourn there might be a very brief one was not to be realized. Mr. Hartswood adhered firmly to his resolve not to quit London; and dissatisfied as he was with his

lodging, as indeed he was with everything else, he so greatly disliked the trouble of a change, that Claudia soon found that it was worse than useless to propose one. The state of Mr. Hartswood's health was such as would have embittered a life spent in a paradise of beauty. The anxiety and annoyance which the lawyer had lately endured had had an effect on his brain, not producing actual madness, but symptoms so nearly resembling its effects as to render it difficult to define the difference between them. The once cheerful, sweet-tempered companion—the clear-headed, intellectual man—the tender, considerate father—had become peevish, gloomy, and suspicious. Mr. Hartswood was haunted by a fear of approaching poverty and ruin, which not only depressed his spirits, but completely destroyed all comfort in domestic arrangements. Claudia's slender purse had been drained by her own journey and Martha's; but when she asked for a little money, she met with so painful a rebuff that it needed a considerable amount of courage to repeat the request. But money was absolutely needful; many things were required, and Claudia was in real difficulty and perplexity how to procure them.

Much of annoyance met the poor young maiden commencing housekeeping under circumstances so painful. Mr. Hartswood seemed to expect that tea-

caddy and wine-decanter would fill themselves, while Mrs. Maul, on the other hand, appeared to consider it natural that they should empty themselves; for the supplies which Claudia had with great difficulty obtained rapidly disappeared with no difficulty at all. Washing bills, butcher and grocer's bills became to Claudia objects of actual dread. She had a horror for debt, and she knew not how to account to others for delay of payment, without betraying to strangers the peculiar and distressing state of her father's mind. Such cares as these may be called petty, but to Claudia they formed an accumulating and almost insupportable burden. They were lightened by no personal kindness shown to herself by him who caused them. Unreasonable aversion to those once most tenderly loved is no unusual symptom of incipient derangement. Claudia, with bitter grief, found herself treated with harshness and regarded with suspicion by the parent whose idol she had been, and who had placed in her honour and truth trust the most full and implicit. So agonizing to her feelings was this trial, that a hundred times Claudia, doubting her own power to sustain it longer, half resolved to avail herself of her father's permission, and return to the peaceful country home which she had left for his sake, and remain there at least until Friern Hatch

should be let—an indefinite period which might never arrive. But Claudia always repelled the idea of this flight from her post of duty as being cowardly and self-indulgent. She was not aware that Mr. Hartswood's altered manner arose from any affection of the brain or perversion of mind; but Claudia knew her parent to be in weak health and very low spirits, requiring all the tender care which a loving child could bestow.

In the days of her joyous childhood, her happy youth, there had been three qualities on the possession of which Claudia had especially prided herself—a brave spirit, a strong love of truth, and fervent filial affection. But it is one thing to possess such qualities when they shine like torches in some sheltered hall, and another thing to preserve them when they resemble these same torches borne aloft through pelting rain and rushing blast by one whose feet are stumbling over a difficult path! It is one thing to let a boat drift down the current of some glassy sea, and another thing to steer her over a stormy sea against wind and tide, shipping water at every plunge over the foaming billows! One of Claudia's trials was that she was disappointed with herself, that she now discovered that she was by no means all that she had believed herself to be. To suffer calmly, smile cheerfully, look forward hope-

fully, was no longer within her power. Her filial devotion, which, under a parent's encouraging smile, would have carried her through tempest and fire, was put to a long weary trial by the change in that parent's demeanour. Where there had been confidence, there was suspicion; where tender kindness, frowns and reproofs; liberality was succeeded by a niggardly closeness which interfered every day, and all day long, with Miss Hartswood's personal comfort. Claudia's affection for her father had been to her once a source of honest delight, now it embittered her cup of sorrow.

Claudia also found how difficult it is to adhere strictly to truth when under the influence of fear. Falsehood is but too natural an accompaniment of a state of bondage, and Claudia was enduring a kind of domestic slavery which made it no easy task to keep free from deceit of look and of lip. The girl who had been wont to speak out freely every thought which arose in her mind, sure to meet with indulgence and candour, if not with sympathy and praise, had now to be carefully guarded in every sentence that she uttered. It needed resolution to confess that she had made some small necessary purchase, or given a simple order. Claudia often wondered whether her character were rapidly deteriorating, it seemed so increasingly difficult to obey

the dictates of conscience ; every day appeared to make her more sensible of her failures ; but this was because her self-knowledge was becoming deeper ; circumstances were throwing increasing light on the mirror of truth ; and, through tears of regret and disappointment, Claudia was looking steadily at her own sad reflection within it.

There was abundant time for thought during the long dreary days. Mr. Hartswood was usually absent for many hours at a time : he never offered to take his daughter with him as his companion, though the poor girl, like a prisoned bird, longed to leave her cage and stretch her wings—if but for a little while. When Claudia grew weary of the dull sitting-room, or the yet duller attic above, her only resource was a constitutional walk up and down the pavement of the hot, narrow court, to breathe air mingled with dust and smoke, where all the small square windows to the right, to the left, in front and behind, seemed like so many dull eyes watching the youthful captive at every step which she took. Claudia often felt inclined to break bounds, and plunge alone into the tide of human life which she could hear surging without the precincts of Little Bread Court. She did so two or three times, venturing a short way along the more cheerful streets, but soon turned back, aware that her father would

be displeased at her wandering about London without a companion, and feeling that it would be wrong to do that without his knowledge which she knew that she would fear to confess. Claudia would turn back to her miserable abode, in which she could not enjoy even the solace of stillness. Mrs. Maul had a family of neglected, uneducated children, and her only idea of managing their tempers was by the sharp word and the angry blow. Scolding voices, cries of passion or of pain, became sounds but too familiar to the ear of Claudia Hartswood, and painfully they contrasted with what she had heard in her peaceful home—the music of the soft breeze, and the notes of the nightingale's song!





CHAPTER XXII.

WEARY LIFE.



DON'T know how it is that I can never get an eatable egg in this place!" cried Mr. Hartswood, pushing away with a look of disgust that which had been brought for his breakfast. "We have been here for nearly four weeks, and it's the same complaint every morning."

"Indeed, papa, it is not for want of my speaking to Mrs. Maul," replied Claudia, whose last colloquy with the landlady on the subject had been very unpleasant. "Mrs. Maul was almost as angry when I expressed a suspicion about the age of the 'new-laid eggs,' as she was when I suggested that these curtains might not be the worse for a little soap and water. She declared that fresher eggs were not to be had in all London. Of course she was trying to throw dust in my eyes; dust being the only thing," continued the poor girl, with a desperate attempt at a joke, "which can be had here in any quantity—'free, gratis, and for nothing.'"

Mr. Hartswood was not in the least disposed to smile. "As for dust," he observed, "I could write my name in it on the chest of drawers in my room; that idle girl Polly can never even have touched it."

"I don't think that Polly is idle—she is a poor little overworked drudge," said Claudia, who felt real pity for the girl. "She has to wait on us, and on Mr. Paley, her mistress, her mistress's mother, and a herd of children besides."

"Those wretched children!" exclaimed Mr. Hartswood, in a tone of impatience; "they made such a racket overhead this morning that they almost drove me out of my room."

"Oh, you have not one quarter as much of their music as falls to my lot, papa!" cried Claudia. "The favourite haunt of these little Bedouins is the staircase between the second floor and the attic. Yesterday, coming down from my room in the dusk, I stumbled over little Sam half asleep at the top of the staircase, and had a narrow escape from hurling him head-foremost to the bottom, and of following myself with a flying leap, which might have broken my neck."

Claudia was trying hard to be lively, for she had been reproached, ten minutes before, for having grown so silent and dull. But her forced mirth met with no response from her father.

"I see nothing very amusing either in the idea of falling yourself, or of being the cause of the fall of another," said Mr. Hartswood, with cruel emphasis, as he pushed back his chair, and rose from the table.

Claudia felt the sting of the taunt, and had a struggle to keep down the tears which came so much more readily to her eyes than the forced smile to her lips.

Mr. Hartswood, with his hands behind him, walked to the window, and remained for some time looking out on the court without speaking. He then turned round with the muttered remark, "In such a den of a place as this, who would look for anything like comfort?"

"Then why should we not leave it, papa?" asked Claudia, with timid eagerness.

"You want to go, I suppose," said Mr. Hartswood, drily.

"Oh yes, if you——"

"Then I'm sure that I don't know why you stay here," interrupted the lawyer. "Friern Hatch is empty, as you are aware; I never required, nor do I wish the society of a daughter who is tired of being with her father," and taking up his hat, Mr. Hartswood quitted the room, to repair, as was his wont at that hour, to one of the courts of law.

Claudia moaned aloud, as soon as her father was beyond hearing her. Life had become to her such a weary, oppressive thing.

"I wonder what makes that young lady so very, very unhappy," thought Polly, the general servant, as she carried away the tray with the breakfast things jingling upon it. "She has plenty to eat and drink, no mistress to worrit her, and no work to do from morning till night! Dear, I wish I was she!"

Long sat Claudia, listless and joyless, scarcely sensible of aught but a gnawing pain at her heart. At last she took pen and paper; sad thoughts were forming themselves into verse; it was some relief to give vent to sorrow in the language of prayer,—

"Hear, O Almighty Father, Power divine,
The sighs that reach no other ear than Thine,
The anguish which no other eye may see;
Thou who art merciful as well as just,
Raise not Thine arm to crush a worm to dust,
Who, humbly prostrate at Thy footstool laid,
Invokes Thy mercy, and implores Thine aid!"

The tears of Claudia fell on her paper and blistered the page. She was so much absorbed in her writing, that she did not at first notice Polly's knock at the sitting-room door.

"Here's a lady as wants to see you," said the servant girl, opening the door, and without further

ceremony ushering a visitor in. Claudia rose hastily, surprised at any acquaintance finding her out in her dismal retreat, and vexed at being discovered in tears. Yet was there a sense of comfort, almost of pleasure, when Claudia saw again the sweet countenance of Mrs. Latham, and felt again the pressure of her hand and of her lips. She felt grateful to the friend of her mother for seeking her out at a time when all the rest of the world had either forsaken her or forgotten. Mrs. Latham had brought with her roses, whose sweet fragrance pervaded the room.





CHAPTER XXIII.

SYMPATHY.

WHAT a balm to a wounded spirit is the sympathy of a friend!" How keenly Claudia realized this during the long interview which followed the entrance of Mrs. Latham. Only severe illness had prevented the lady from coming before: that illness had rendered her manner yet more gentle and tender, personal suffering had deepened feeling for the sufferings of others. Claudia knew that no mean curiosity had brought her friend to her side. The heart of the unhappy girl, which had been like a drooping vine, putting forth tendrils but finding nothing to which they could cling for support, experienced the greatest relief in pouring out to an indulgent listener the whole story of her woes. Claudia concealed nothing, palliated nothing; she was aware that Mrs. Latham must not only have heard the tale of her intercourse with Helena, but had probably heard it related with such exaggerations and distortion of

Mrs. Latham quietly listened to the agitated girl, without interrupting her narrative even by a question; but Claudia instinctively felt that deep interest and sympathy were aroused in her silent hearer.

“And all this misery came upon me on the very evening when you and I were conversing together in my dear bright home!” exclaimed Claudia, as she concluded her story. “When I saw you bending down to smell those beautiful flowers in the vase, how little I dreamt that my happiness would be shorter-lived than their blossoms! I was feeling so proud and so joyous! I remember—you will forgive my folly now!—I remember that I was almost angry because you seemed to think that there were some things needful which had never been mine, that the soul has senses of its own, higher, nobler than the intellectual, which an

ignorant boor might have, and a gifted statesman might lack. I could not bear such a humbling theory; I fancied myself to be so clear-sighted, that it irritated me to think that any one could possibly consider me blind."

"And now, dear Claudia," said her friend, "reviewing calmly all the past, how do you yourself regard the subject on which we conversed on that evening?"

"My eyes are opened to some things to which they were closed before," answered Claudia. "I see that I am very unlike what I then deemed myself to be; I had never believed that I could prove so weak, so foolish, so sinful." Tears dropped from the downcast eyes of Claudia as she made the confession; then raising them to those of her friend, in an earnest tone she continued: "Oh, Mrs. Latham, is this sense of helplessness, and shame, and regret for the past the *spiritual sight* of which you were speaking when we last met? Is this the kind of opening of the eyes for which David prayed? I could not pray for it, it makes me so wretched. When Adam and Eve's eyes were opened they hid themselves from God; it seems as if God were hiding His face from me!" Claudia could not stifle her sobs. Mrs. Latham put her arm around the weeping girl, and drew her close to her

bosom. Claudia had never known the loving care of a mother, now she felt as if she had found one.

"The spiritual sight which is given to the children of God, dear Claudia, is not merely this painful, humiliating knowledge of self," said the lady. "The light which His Spirit bestows shows us indeed our own errors, but it shows us also that which makes the contrite heart sing for joy. Light is a gladsome thing, and spiritual sight is the source of bliss the most intense and perfect that the soul can know upon earth."

"I cannot understand what you mean by spiritual sight, if it be anything but seeing our own errors," said Claudia; "the light which shows them to us can certainly cause us no joy."

"Let me exemplify my meaning," said the lady, "by reminding you of the story of the disciples who met the Lord on their way to Emmaus, as they discoursed together and were sad. Those disciples had some faith, though imperfect; but it brought them sorrow, not gladness. Their minds were full of their Lord, but religion appears to have brought them then neither comfort nor peace."

"So it is with me," murmured Claudia.

"But the moment that *their eyes were opened*,

and they knew the Lord," said her friend, "all their sorrow passed away, like the shadows of night when the sun bursts forth from the east. The glimpse of the risen Saviour sufficed to make His disciples happy."

"But we can have no such blessed glimpse now," observed Claudia.

"Oh, say not so, my dear child. We cannot indeed behold our Lord with our bodily eyes as did the disciples, but we may with that spiritual sense which is the gift of His Spirit. Claudia, how do *you* look upon your Lord now?"

"As my Master, Judge, and the Saviour of sinners," replied Claudia with reverence; "I have always regarded Him thus."

"But have you looked upon Him as *your own*, your *personal* Saviour, as one who died for *your* sins, who loves *you*, who calls you by your name and says, '*Thou art Mine?*' Do you realize that the Redeemer yearns over you now with a love more lasting, more deep, more intense than that of a mother?"

"If I could but believe *that*," faltered Claudia, "I could be happy indeed. But how can I ever believe it, unworthy as I am of such love!"

"Oh, my child, look upwards instead of inwards; lift up the eyes of your soul to Him who says of

His feeble wandering sheep, *I will heal their backslidings ; I will love them freely.* Yes, freely Christ loves, freely He forgives, freely He saves : *look up* to Him for pardon, life, grace, happiness ; it is His delight to lavish all these gifts upon those who cast themselves on His mercy."

Claudia's eyes were still brimming over with tears ; but the light of hope was dawning now on her soul.

"You spoke just now," continued her friend, "of our first parents hiding *from* God ; vain attempt of the sin-convicted soul until it is led to hide *in* God. When our eyes are opened to see Christ as our all-sufficient Saviour—when faith can, as it were, touch His hands and side wounded for us—then a well-spring of joy is opened for us which eternity cannot exhaust, our everlasting life *has begun.*"

Mrs. Latham's voice was silent, but her heart was pleading in prayer for the poor stricken lamb at her side. Not a word was spoken for several moments either by Claudia or her friend, but lines were haunting the mind of the girl with which she had long been familiar, but which she had never before understood.

" Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee ! "

Trouble and humiliation had been as a gale driving her close and closer to that Rock ; but, for the first time, Claudia now cast herself entirely upon it, clinging with the grasp of faith to the only sure ground for peace now, or for glory hereafter.





CHAPTER XXIV.

NEW LIFE.

OH, how I wish that I lived nearer to you, that I could constantly see you, and have your advice in every difficulty!" cried Claudia, after some further conversation with her friend.

"I wish it also," replied Mrs. Latham; "but this place must be three miles at least from my home, and my late severe illness has thrown me sadly into arrears with my parish work." Mrs. Latham looked greatly fatigued with her journey through the hot streets in a rattling hired conveyance, for she kept no carriage of her own.

"Parish work!" repeated Claudia with glistening eyes; "how delightful it must be to work for God! How thankful I should be to be allowed to do something—were it ever so little—to show my gratitude and love!"

Is not this ever the feeling of the soul renewed and converted? As soon as the eyes are opened to

the knowledge of God's love, as soon as Faith lays hold on His promises, the spiritual ear listens eagerly for the answer to the question, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" As it is in the physical, so is it in the spiritual nature, the senses are closely linked with each other, all alike owing their existence to the new life which God has imparted.

"I am afraid that you could scarcely work with me," observed Mrs. Latham, "glad as I should be of your aid; but the distance between us is great."

"I fear that I shall have difficulty in ever reaching your home," said Claudia; "I have no servant here to escort me, I cannot go about London alone, and my father is always absent during the greater part of the day."

Mrs. Latham reflected a little; she was anxious to find employment for the energies of Claudia Hartswood, to prevent her pining in lonely inaction, and to cheer her spirits by the consciousness that she was using her talents for God.

"There is a ragged-school very near to this place," she observed. "It so happens that a valued servant of mine has married a saddler whose shop is almost close to the entrance of this court; she goes every morning to teach for two hours in the Need Lane School, your house would be little out of her way. Mrs. Giles would be a most unobjectionable

escort, and, I am sure, would willingly call for you every day at a quarter to ten, if you would like to volunteer as a ragged-school teacher. Earnest labourers are needed so much !”

Claudia, with eager pleasure, heard of this unexpected opening to a course of usefulness, afforded to her by an arrangement so simple and easy. “ You do not know how such work would encourage and cheer me !” she exclaimed with an animation which she had not shown since she had found herself the victim of Helena’s fraud. “ It is not merely that I wish to be useful,” she continued, with her natural candour ; “ I am afraid that a great deal of selfishness mixes with my desire to teach. I have grown weary, oh, so weary of having nothing to do, I have become so tired of my own society, that any kind of change—any sort of work—would be welcome ; I had almost said any company, even that of ragged-school children.”

Mrs. Latham felt tender sympathy for the poor caged prisoner. She rejoiced to see how Claudia’s spirits were rising under the influence of hope, as the parched and withering plant revives beneath a refreshing shower.

“ But I must ask the consent of my father,” said Claudia more gravely.

“ Mr. Hartswood is not likely to object when

you tell him that Mrs. Giles was my servant for nearly ten years," said the lady. "He told my husband long ago how much he approved of girls making themselves useful in teaching the poor."

But Claudia knew by bitter experience that her father was very different now from what he had been "long ago." Irritable and soured in temper, Mr. Hartswood was disposed to regard everything from the gloomiest point of view. For his daughter to desire an object seemed sufficient to make him oppose it. A temptation arose before the mind of Claudia to make her arrangements for visiting the school without mentioning the subject to her father at all. Had she not the sanction of the friend of her mother? was it not right to teach the ignorant? why should she suffer hindrance in doing God's work from the causeless suspicions or groundless fears of another? Mr. Hartswood was never at home during the hours when she would be absent; not only could Claudia carry out the proposed scheme without causing her father inconvenience, but without its coming to his knowledge.

The temptation was subtle, but was instantly repelled. Claudia was not to become less open and truthful in word and look, when Truth, in its highest and holiest form, first found a place in her heart; her new-born spirit of loving trust in a heavenly

Father was not to make her less submissive to the will of an earthly parent. Claudia had suffered too much from listening to the deluding voice which bids us do evil that good may come, to enter again on a course of deceit to accomplish a pious end.

“ I will speak to papa when he comes home, and write and tell you his wishes,” said Claudia. “ He may not think me fit to teach others,” continued the poor girl in a hesitating tone, “ after all that has happened. My dear father is displeased with me, *justly* displeased. Oh, Mrs. Latham, I hope—I believe that God has forgiven my sin, but I would give all that I have upon earth to be sure that my father could quite forgive me—fully trust me again ! ”

Claudia spoke from a deeply-wounded heart, and Mrs. Latham was convinced that loneliness and personal discomforts formed by no means the sharpest part of the trial of the penitent girl. The clergyman’s wife had heard something of Mr. Hartswood’s ebullitions of temper even in a court of justice ; she knew that it was whispered in various quarters that not only the health of the lawyer, but the powers of his mind were affected ; and she was strengthened in her fear that the change noticed by strangers must be most painfully felt in his home.

“ You may—we may make this a subject for prayer, my love,” said the lady, gently pressing the

clasped hands of Claudia. "It is such an unspeakable relief to bring our earthly trials as well as our spiritual wants to the footstool of grace."

"And may we not pray that these lost papers may yet be found, that all this horrible mystery may be made as clear as daylight?" cried Claudia. "This may be but an earthly desire, but it is so near—so very near to my heart."

"This care—like all other cares—you are not only permitted but commanded to cast upon Him who careth for you, my dear child. Pray with submission, pray with faith, and be assured that though the answer may not come at once, or come in a way that you little expected—though your patience may long be tried, delay is not denial, and that He who knows what is best will give what is best to the child who trusteth in Him."

The visitor soon afterwards departed, but metaphorically, as well as literally, she had left her flowers behind her. The aching void in the heart of Claudia was filled. The weary wanderer in life's desert had seen the fountain gush forth, a spring of love, and peace, and joy, of which none but those who have tasted it once can tell the exquisite sweetness. Religion had been to Claudia as a beautiful picture upon which the mental eye had rested with pleasure, before remorse had drawn a dark veil before

it. But with very different feelings do we look upon a picture, however it may raise our admiration, from those with which we behold the rich landscape which it so coldly represents, spread out in living beauty around us ; when we feel the warm sunshine that bathes it in light, and survey the wide-spreading horizon, knowing that we ourselves are heirs of all that its circle encloses. Wonderful is *physical* life, that endows flesh and blood with power of motion, giving sight to the eyes, hearing to the ears, existence to all the senses that are to the organic form vehicles of varied delight. But this physical life we share in common with beasts that perish.

More wonderful is *intellectual* life, that opens out wide prospects to the eye of imagination, that gives quickness to comprehension, that enables its possessor to perceive, discern, and judge as if by intuition. But this grand intellectual life we share with the angels that fell !

Most wondrous is *spiritual* life, that life which flows alone from union with Him who is Himself THE LIFE ! *The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are spiritually discerned* (1 Cor. ii. 14). This is a truth which the world refuses to accept, yet it is distinctly declared by Christ Himself. *That which is*

born of the flesh is flesh ; that which is born of the Spirit is spirit (John iii. 6). *Ye must be born again* (John iii. 7). To the children of the kingdom all things have become new ; new hopes, new desires, new motives are theirs ; where their treasure is their hearts are also ; they delight in God's Word and God's work. This glorious spiritual life they share with angels and archangels, and all the company of heaven ; it is that life begun upon earth over which death itself has no power !

In regard to the time of conversion the experience of believers will vary. Mrs. Latham could recall no period of her life when religion had not the first place in her heart, no period when she had been quite destitute of spiritual life. Claudia, on the contrary, though she had been gradually prepared for the change by regret, reflection, and weariness of heart, ever looked back on that day in August as on the birth-day of her soul. Of the first breathings of spiritual life it has been well written,* “ Very many true children of God, as they know not the day nor the hour when their Lord shall return, so they knew not the day nor the hour when He first came to be guest with them, sinners as they were. Not the *day* but the *fact* is the point we want to know. An oak is an oak, though we may not know when

* “ Fruit in Old Age,” by the Rev. F. Horr.

the acorn from which it grew was planted. Let the tree be there, a tree bearing fruit to God, and we know that the Spirit of God has wrought—that there is a living soul!”

Oh! that I could persuade each of my readers to pause, close the book for awhile, and solemnly ask these questions of conscience. Have I this new life, this new nature? Have I spiritual *sight*—do I look to Christ for salvation? Do I listen for His guiding voice with the willing *ear* of obedience? With the hand of Faith do I touch, as it were, the hem of His garment? Do I *taste* the sweetness of His love, and realize the fragrance of that holiness which His Spirit alone can impart? If all these things as yet be strange to me, may I not rest until they are mine—till with spiritual life I receive the spiritual senses which are a proof of its existence, and can say, like the man whose eyes were opened, *One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see!*





CHAPTER XXV.

WAITING AND WORKING.

CLAUDIA had always been fond of flowers, but never had she felt such pleasure in the finest exotics as in those sweet red roses which Mrs. Latham had brought. As the young maiden placed them in water she kissed their soft petals, and inhaled their perfume with a sense of delight. She now cherished the roses for the sake of Him who has written His loving-kindness upon earth in blossoming lines of beauty. The sunshine which, but a short time before, had seemed to Claudia oppressive, now cheered and gladdened her heart. Every sunbeam that found its way into the narrow London court came with a message of hope. Even the poor birds, twittering on dark, shrivelled branches, told now of providential care—not one of them was forgotten by Him who made it. For the first time since she had left Friern Hatch Claudia did not find time hang heavy on her hands. She set eagerly to work to prepare for the teaching

which she hoped so soon to commence ; she brought down her Bible, now to her a treasury of wealth untold, to select appropriate verses for ragged children to learn, and she drew upon her memory for anecdotes to illustrate her scriptural lessons. Claudia's vivid imagination, quick comprehension, and intuitive tact would be a great advantage to her as a teacher ; both physical and intellectual powers are precious gifts when they are consecrated to God. Claudia was so happy in her new occupation, with Bible, pen, and paper before her, that almost unconsciously her lips burst into a song of praise—

“ Thee to serve, and Thee to know,
Forms the bliss of saints below ;
Thee to see, and Thee to love,
Forms the bliss of saints above ! ”

It may be thought that Claudia, preparing to teach a ragged class, was engaged in much the same occupation as when she searched her father's books, and drew upon the knowledge of his guest for arguments to effect the conversion of a Roman Catholic nun ; both appeared to be work for souls. The great difference was not in the nature of the employment, but in the spirit in which it was pursued. Claudia was not now seeking to display her powers of persuasion, or her talent for logic ; she was hoping for no earthly distinction or praise to accrue

to herself from success; she wished to teach the Lord's lambs because she loved Him, and all the honour that she sought was to hear at last the gracious "well done" of the Master.

Claudia was still busy with her little preparations when her father returned. She received him with a brighter smile than her face had worn for months. Mr. Hartswood seated himself with a weary air, took off his hat, and wiped his heated brow. Claudia had a cooling beverage ready for her father—light slippers to replace his dusty boots, and kneeling down, put them herself on his feet—then brought to him the roses, which she had placed in a stone-ware jar.

"Are these not delightful, papa!" said Claudia; "they fill the whole room with fragrance—and roses are your favourite flowers."

"You've not had the folly to buy them?" was the stern, ungracious reply.

"Oh no; I've been guilty of no such extravagance," said Claudia, gaily. "I had a visitor to-day. Can you guess who found me out in—I cannot say *rural* seclusion?"

Mr. Hartswood was in no humour for guessing, but he was well pleased to hear of the visit of Mrs. Latham. One of the causes of the lawyer's irritability and depression was a persuasion that all

the world had forsaken him. Not only had he received no fresh briefs since his papers had been carried off by the pseudo-nun, but his acquaintance appeared to be falling away, as the rest of the herd are said to forsake the stricken deer. This apparent desertion was partly owing to Mr. Hartswood's choice of Little Bread Court for his place of abode ; but his gloomy mind attributed it entirely to the worldliness of mankind, which made summer friends take wing when prosperity's sunshine was clouded. Claudia perceived that her account of the visit was not unacceptable to her father ; but, when she mentioned the ragged-school plan, all his irritable manner returned.

"Humbug and nonsense !" cried Mr. Hartswood, pushing back his chair from the table. "No daughter of mine shall go hunting about London alleys and lanes to pick up barefooted beggars out of the gutter !"

"Not hunting about, dear papa," said Claudia, with perfect good-humour ; "they are all caught and caged ready to my hand ; and Mrs. Latham says—"

"I wish that Mrs. Latham would mind her own parish, and not put nonsensical schemes into the head of a silly girl. If you want some one to teach, why don't you look after the romping brats here, who drive me wild with their noise overhead ?"

Mr. Hartswood made an impatient movement with his arm as he uttered the last words, which threw down the roses which Claudia had put near her father. The water was spilled, and the jar was broken.

Claudia went on her knees to repair the mischief as well as she could, first gently raising the roses, and then picking up the fragments of the jar. Mr. Hartswood was as angry at the little accident as if it had been caused by wilful carelessness on the part of his daughter. He was aware that the broken stoneware jar would figure as Dresden china in the landlady's bill. .

It was no small disappointment and mortification to Claudia to have to write to Mrs. Latham that Mr. Hartswood refused to let his daughter teach in the Need Lane School. Her regret had not, however, the bitterness which would have been hers but for the new spring of hope and love of which she had tasted. Claudia could take disappointment meekly, for she was seeking in all things now to subject her will to that of her heavenly Master.

"I am not yet worthy to be allowed to work in the vineyard," thought Claudia, as she closed her desk after writing her note; "but, perhaps, if I watch and wait, some little quiet corner may be found even for me."

As Claudia was retiring to rest, the sound of a peevish cry recalled to her mind the words of her father: "Why don't you look after the romping brats here?" Though uttered in impatience, these words might convey a valuable hint.

"It is possible," reflected Claudia, "that the work which I was so eager to begin outside this house may be awaiting me within it. I may find neglected, unmanageable children without even crossing the threshold."

The sympathies of Claudia were, indeed, far more easily enlisted on behalf of homeless, hungry, ragged scholars, than on behalf of the noisy imps who quarrelled in the attic-room next to her own, or chased each other up and down the upper flight of stairs. Claudia disliked having any communication that was not actually indispensable with their vulgar mother, whose covetousness and meanness made her especially repulsive to the young lady. But Claudia felt that she must not choose her own work, but thankfully accept whatever might be assigned to her by the Great Master. She arose in the morning with the prayer on her lips,—

"Show me what I ought to do.
Every day my strength renew;
Let me live the life of faith,
Let me die the Christian's death;"

petty worries of domestic life were as hateful to the spirited intellectual girl, as a yoke on the neck would be to the stag accustomed to range freely through the forest. The yoke had hitherto chafed and galled Claudia almost beyond endurance, but now she was trying to bear it with meekness as part of the "heavenly discipline" which she needed.

As Mrs. Maul was about to quit the room after having received, with her usual ill grace, a mild expostulation on an exorbitant charge, Claudia stopped the landlady, and speaking with an effort which brought the colour to her now usually pale cheek, she made the proposal to teach the children in terms considerate and courteous.

"You are so much occupied in other ways," said the young lady in conclusion, "that you may not have, as I have, time to give to instructing your children."

But instead of gratifying the mother, the implied need of such instruction roused the landlady's pride.

"Thank you; but I am quite able to pay for my

children's schooling," was the tart reply ; " I want no charity teaching for them ; and my lodgers have no need to trouble themselves at all about my family concerns ;" and with an insolent toss of the head, the landlady quitted the room.

Thus a second time was Claudia baffled in her attempt to engage in useful work ; a second time met with rebuff instead of encouragement in her endeavours to do good. Claudia was tempted, as many a Christian has been tempted, to think that she was laid aside as a useless, worthless instrument, when her very mortification and disappointment were as the grindstone to sharpen that instrument for the work which it was yet to perform.

Claudia was cheered by the reply to her note to Mrs. Latham, which she received in the course of the day.

" Be not discouraged, dear one ; disciples who would fain work, like Martha, and serve much, seem sometimes, by circumstances, to be debarred from working at all. I experienced this in my late trying illness, but I also found that the waiting time is a blessed time, if, like Mary, we seek to spend it at the feet of our Lord. Be on the watch for small opportunities for usefulness, but do not fall into the mistake of supposing that all work is that which men usually call by that name. To combat dis-

might certainly do something for his comfort with my needle. Emma Holder does much, I know, in this way for her parents ; but of all things I dislike mending linen ; I would far rather employ my mind than my fingers—any drudge can prick rags ! But may not pride lurk in that thought ? After all, the question is not whether work be small or great, pleasant or irksome, but whether it be the work given to us to do. I remember once reading, I forget in what book, that if two angels were sent to earth, the one to govern an empire, the other to sweep a crossing, they would undertake their missions with equal readiness, and fulfil them with equal pleasure.”

Claudia rose, and opening one of the folding-doors, which divided the sitting-room from her father’s

apartment, entered the latter, to examine into the state of his wardrobe. Another little office of love presented itself as Claudia looked round the dusty, untidy room, which the over-worked general servant had neither the time nor the taste to arrange in such order as that to which Mr. Hartswood had long been accustomed. Claudia, once so full of pride of intellect, so lofty in her aspirations, so ambitious in her day-dreams, did not now think it beneath her dignity to dust and arrange, as well as to mend and darn. The well-known lines of Herbert, like a familiar strain of music, recurred to her mind as she pursued her unwonted occupation—

“ Who sweeps a room as in Thy sight,
Makes that and the action fine.”

On Mr. Hartswood's return he found his daughter busy in repairing one of his shirts. Claudia was a little disappointed at not receiving from her father a word of approbation, or even a smile; but the consciousness that she had done what she could brought with it its own reward.

Nor was Claudia to lay her head on her pillow that night without an opportunity of speaking a word for her Master, and casting a ray of joy on a path more dreary than her own. True, the word was spoken but to a poor young general servant; the

joy was caused but by the gift of an old hymn-book. Poor Martha, who had never time to go to church, and who had been in danger of forgetting, in the hurry and bustle of a lodging-house, what she had learned in a Sunday school; the orphan, whose heart was gradually withering up from want of human sympathy, was delighted by the kindly notice of the fair young lady, who asked her whether she loved her Lord, and found comfort in bringing her troubles to him. Claudia felt that she had touched a chord which responded, and that, shut out as she herself was from the sphere of usefulness which she longed for, she was yet granted the privilege of ministering to one neglected soul. Thankful for this privilege, and submissively waiting till more should be given, Claudia went to her rest. Her pilgrimage was still through the desert into which her own act of folly had led her, but the stream of mercy followed her, and she was "a day's march nearer home."





CHAPTER XXVI.

HOME CARES.

AMONGST the letters which Mr. Hartswood received at breakfast-time on the following morning was one in the direction of which Claudia recognized the handwriting of Mrs. Latham. Mr. Hartswood opened it, glanced carelessly over the note, and then threw it upon the table, concluding his meal in silence, which Claudia did not venture to break, though a little impatient to know what her friend had written, as she felt sure that it regarded herself.

"Mrs. Latham wants me to allow you to accompany her and her husband to the Museum to-morrow," said Mr. Hartswood at last, "to see some ancient curiosities just arrived from Assyria. She writes about some Mrs. Giles calling for you at ten (it being a school holiday to-morrow), and taking you to the house of some invalid in Museum Street, where your friends will meet you without going out of their way. It's an odd enough place of rendez-

vous ; but odd places suit odd people. I should not have wondered if Mrs. Latham had invited you to meet her in Bedlam."

"I should gladly meet her anywhere," thought Claudia.

"Mrs. Latham writes," continued the lawyer, "that she or her husband will escort you back here before dusk. Do you care to go?" he asked, abruptly.

Claudia cared much, less on account of the visit to the Museum than for the opportunity which it would give her of enjoying the society of her friend. "If you have no objection, dear papa," she replied.

"As you were working yesterday, I suppose that you have earned a right to play to-morrow," said Mr. Hartwood, with an approach to the playfulness of manner which once made his society delightful. "You may write and tell your friend that this duenna of hers may call for you at ten, but that I expect you home again in good time for dinner."

Claudia was pleased to find that her attention to her father's comfort had not been unnoticed after all, and that though he never seemed to forget or forgive her conduct regarding Helena, yet that it was not quite impossible to win from him a token of approbation. Claudia's impulse was to throw

her arms round her father's neck, kiss him and thank him, as she would have done a few months before, but she dared no longer assert the sweet privilege of a child. Since she had come to Little Bread Court, Claudia had never received kiss or smile from her father.

It almost seemed on the succeeding day as if Mr. Hartswood regretted having accorded even a few hours' relaxation to his daughter, and was resolved to make her pay a heavy penalty for a short pleasure. He appeared at the breakfast-table more gloomy and irritable than usual, but, unhappily, not so silent. It was only by constantly realizing the presence of one Friend who pitied and could help her, that Claudia could endure, without bursting into tears, the bitter taunts, the perpetual fault-finding to which she was exposed from her earthly protector.

Scarcely was the miserable meal concluded, at which Claudia had felt as if every morsel which she swallowed would choke her, when a new source of annoyance came, in the form of the week's account, which Mrs. Maul brought in to be settled. If Claudia had been distressed at the bitterness, she was now almost alarmed at the violence of temper shown by the lawyer. In happier days Mr. Hartswood had never forgotten the self-respect which restrains a gentleman from giving way to outbursts of

passion under far greater provocation than that occasioned by overcharges in a bill ; but now, with clenched hand, swollen veins, and flashing eyes, the lawyer abused and threatened in tones so loud, that Mrs. Maul cowered beneath the storm. She left the room, muttering to herself that her lodger must either be drunk or mad, and that had he not given her notice that he would quit, she must have given him notice to do so, for that she was going to stand such language from no one, were he a prince of the blood !

The storm of passion over, Mr. Hartswood threw himself on the sofa, folded his arms, and for some time appeared to be lost in gloomy meditation. Claudia almost feared to move, for the slightest rustle of a dress disturbed her father. Presently he pressed his hand on his temples, as if in pain.

"I trust that you do not suffer from headache, dear father," said Claudia, anxiously.

Mr. Hartswood looked displeased at the question, and did not vouchsafe a reply.

Martha opened the door, and addressed Claudia with the words, "There's a Mrs. Giles a-waiting for you," and then retreated at once, glancing timidly at the lawyer as she did so, as if she feared an explosion, for the sound of his loud altercation with her mistress had been heard all over the house.

"Who's this Mrs. Giles?" asked the lawyer, sharply.

"You remember, papa, the former servant of her own whom Mrs. Latham promised to send to take me to meet her," said Claudia nervously, for her father's brow was darkening. "If you would prefer my staying at home, I will send my excuses by her directly."

"I suppose that since you've made the engagement you must keep it," said Mr. Hartswood, with impatience.

"Not if you are unwell—"

"Who said that I was unwell?" cried Mr. Hartswood, as angrily as if the expression implied an insult. "Go and get ready at once, and don't keep this Mrs. Giles waiting."

"I shall probably be back before you return home, papa," said Claudia, lingering at the door, for something in her father's appearance made her uneasy at leaving him even for but half a day.

"I'm not going out," said the lawyer.

"Then I am sure that you are not well!" cried Claudia, quitting the door, and approaching her parent with tender apprehension. "Let me—do let me write an excuse, and stay here quietly beside you."

"You'd only be in my way; I want to be alone.

I don't care to have you perpetually watching and worrying me!" Mr. Hartswood stamped, as if to give emphasis to the ungracious words which he uttered, and Claudia dared linger no longer. She went to her attic room to make her brief preparations for her walk with a heart wounded and oppressed. Her expected pleasure was changed into pain, but pain softened by her spirit of submission. Instead of chafing against what might have been deemed harshness and unkindness, Claudia now asked for patience to bear without a murmur the trial which she owned that she deserved.

"I must go and meet Mrs. Latham," thought Claudia; "but I will accompany her to no place of amusement. I will return hither with Mrs. Giles as soon as I have explained to my dear kind friend that my father is alone here, and ailing, and that I feel that I ought not to be long away from his side."

As soon as his daughter had quitted the room, Mr. Hartswood rose, and, with knitted brows and compressed lips, strode up and down the small dull apartment like a caged lion pacing his den.

"Why should I go forth," was his bitter reflection; "why attend a court to watch the progress of cases in which I have no concern, or go to the police-office to hear for the fiftieth time that nothing has been discovered regarding the stolen papers?"

Mr. Hartswood was in a highly nervous state, and was aware that the perpetual wear upon his spirits was actually endangering his sanity. The lawyer had been a man of high moral character as well as of intellectual endowments, and he had ever entertained a respect for religion, carefully attending to its outer forms, which, like the daughter whom he had trained, he had mistaken for religion itself. Sorrow and disappointment had drawn Claudia nearer to the source of true comfort, and she had found peace even in tribulation; but with Mr. Hartswood mortification, exposure to calumny, and fear of impending ruin had had a different effect. His faith was shaken, for it had never been deep-rooted; his peace was destroyed, for he could not bow in submission to trial which his self-righteousness deemed undeserved. A spirit of rebellion had taken possession of his soul, and where that spirit abides there can never be peace.

James Hartswood cared not to go out on that sunny morning in September, though there was nothing to tempt him to remain in his dingy, cheerless lodging. Had he known what visitors were about to invade his retreat, he would have avoided their unwelcome intrusion by quitting the house, had rain been descending in torrents.



CHAPTER XXVII.

UNWELCOME VISITORS.

WE will glance now for a few moments into an elegant boudoir in Westbourne Terrace, where Lady Melton, reclining on a damask-covered sofa, is awaiting the announcement of her carriage being at the door; she and her cousin, Sir Tybalt Trelawney, having resolved on a drive to Gray's Inn Lane.

"Nothing can be clearer, more obvious, more indisputable than the fact that there has been collusion, fraud, deception," said Sir Tybalt, speaking with dogmatic decision of manner, mouthing his words, and tapping the palm of his left hand with two fingers of his right, to give force to the expression of his opinion. Sir Tybalt is a middle-aged, soldierly-looking man, with a very small amount of forehead, and a very large amount of whisker and moustache, the latter so overhanging his mouth as completely to conceal it, and make his voice seem to come muffled through a thicket of hair. Sir Tybalt

has unlimited faith in his own powerful judgment, a faith shared by few who have tried it, but he is ready to throw down the gauntlet to any one audacious enough to set up an opinion in opposition to his own. Three ideas have fixed themselves in Sir Tybalt's not very capacious brain. Firstly, that he is able to see much further through a millstone than any other person can see ; secondly, that all lawyers must of necessity be rogues ; and lastly, that his cousin's professional adviser, Mr. Hartswood, is the most cunning of lawyers, and, consequently, the greatest of rogues.

"The story of the nun is indeed most strange and improbable," observed Lady Melton, "and would never have been believed for a moment, were it not that, as the French proverb tells us, *le vrai n'est pas toujours le vraisemblable*."

"Sir Robert Walpole said, and said truly, that every man has his price," remarked Sir Tybalt, with the air of one conscious of his own profound knowledge of the world. "This Friern Hatch robbery has been a kind of jockey transaction from the beginning to the end. You ride my horse and win the race, there's a hundred pounds in your pocket" (Sir Tybalt was not addressing his cousin, Lady Melton, but Lady Melton's lawyer, in his supposed character of a jockey). "My rival winks and whispers, 'You ride that horse and lose the race, there's a

thousand pounds in your pocket!’ ” Sir Tybalt’s fingers came down on his palm with more emphasis than before. “Poor old Curtis might not be up to that kind of gambling transaction, but we know that he died last night, and it is his sporting son that we have to deal with now. Young Curtis is well aware that his success in the race—I mean the law-suit—is as good as two hundred thousand pounds to him or to you ; it’s worth his while to pay well ; he’ll not stickle at a few thousands in closing his bargain. And so the affair is managed, the horse falls lame, or stumbles, or bolts off the course, but ”—here Sir Tybalt drew up his moustachio-covered lip in a sarcastic sneer—“but, of course, the jockey is in no way to blame.” Sir Tybalt leaned back on the cushioned chair, highly satisfied with the neatness of the illustration of which he had made use.

“I should never have thought of doubting James Hartswood,” said Lady Melton, looking perplexed ; “he bore the very highest character. I placed the utmost confidence in him.”

“Ah ! my dear cousin, your sex is so trustful ; you need the support and help of those who have had larger experience of the world and its ways ; those who can look under the surface of things, and neither be beguiled by soft words nor bullied by hard ones.” Sir Tybalt stroked his huge moustachios

with complacency ; he felt that he had been drawing a portrait of himself.

"I spoke with some warmth to Mr. Hartswood when we last met," said Lady Melton ; "perhaps with too much warmth, for I am a little quick in temper, you know, and the loss of all my most valuable papers might have exhausted the patience of a Griselda. But I really felt sorry for poor Hartswood after the words were spoken ; I never saw a person who had aged so rapidly, or lost so much flesh in so short a time. They say that some weeks ago he had a faint or a fit in court !"

"My dear Maria, a man like Hartswood may well betray some uneasiness when he has reputation, fortune, everything on the cast of the die. But I would have no more mercy upon him than I would have on a fox lurking near my hen-roosts, though I might not catch him with a chicken in his mouth. I want to confront this man and his daughter ; she must be either his tool and accomplice, or an actual imbecile, there's no alternative between the two," said Sir Tybalt with decision. "We'll see if the girl sticks to her most improbable story. I'll put up with no doubting ; no evasions—short answers to the point I will have ; these Hartswoods shall find that they have some one to deal with who can't be humbugged, and won't be silenced."

And in this mood Sir Tybalt Trelawney accompanied his cousin in her eastward drive. He was a kind of human Juggernaut, who, himself insensible to any of the more delicate impressions of our nature, cared not how he might over-ride the feelings, crush down the spirit, torture the nerves of his victims. What was it to Sir Tybalt that the mind of the unhappy Hartswood was in so wavering a state that a little pressure from without might throw it altogether off its balance, and reduce the gifted lawyer to a raving maniac? Trelawney had made up his mind that Hartswood had acted a fraudulent part, and that it was his own office to expose and punish the fraud. He set about his work in his coarse rough way, like a bungler attempting to perform a delicate operation with axe and hand-saw.

Unconscious of the impending danger, though far from easy in mind regarding her father, Claudia pursued her way, with Mrs. Giles for her escort. As they passed through the City squares, Claudia conversed with her quiet sensible companion about the ragged school at which she taught, and the invalid in Museum Street whom she was about to visit.

"This is by no means the first time that Mrs. Latham has asked me to call and see poor Miss

Louisa Leicester," said Mrs. Giles, in reply to a question from Claudia. "The place is so far from his parish, that Mr. Latham cannot visit Miss Leicester often without neglecting other duties. It is only lately that Mrs. Latham has had strength to visit at all."

"Is this poor invalid lady a friend of Mr. Latham?" asked Claudia.

"He has been a most kind friend to her," replied Mrs. Giles. "Some weeks ago, as Mr. Latham was walking near the Strand, he saw a terrible accident. A heavy ladder, which had been placed against a house where some repairs were going on, suddenly fell on two ladies, who chanced at the time to be passing. They were picked up, the one—the mother—dead, the daughter grievously bruised, but not insensible. Mr. Latham, I need hardly say, gave every assistance in his power, and the poor young lady was conveyed, by her own desire, to her lodgings in Museum Street, with the lifeless body of her mother, Mr. Latham accompanying her in the cab."

"What a fearful shock to the unhappy daughter!" exclaimed Claudia. "She must almost have wished that the accident which killed her mother had united them by taking her also."

"Miss Leicester has never recovered from the

shock," observed Mrs. Giles, "and I fear that she never will. It seems to me that she is gradually sinking. The doctor says that no bones are broken—one sees little of outward hurt—but she is in terribly low spirits, nothing can rouse her, and she is wasting away to a shadow."

"I feel for her from my heart!" cried Claudia: and she thought, "How small, how insignificant do my trials appear compared with those of this poor afflicted young lady."

"Is Miss Leicester in distressed circumstances as regards money?" inquired Claudia, after walking on for some moments in silence.

"Though not rich, she does not seem to me poor," replied Mrs. Giles; "Miss Leicester seems to want no comforts; but kind good Mr. Latham would never allow her to want. The young lady appears to be otherwise very friendless; except the landlady, a nurse, and the doctor, I have never found any one beside her, nor have I heard of any relative coming to see her. I suppose that Mr. Latham has learned to whom to send in case of Miss Leicester's illness being likely to end in death. The doctor thinks that if it were possible to gain her confidence, and interest her mind in anything, she might recover yet; but I have found it useless to try to draw from her even a word. I believe; indeed I know," con-

tinued Mrs. Giles, "that one reason why Mrs. Latham wished you to meet her to-day at Miss Leicester's lodging, was the hope, miss, that you, being nearer her own age, might possibly win more confidence, and do more to comfort the poor young lady than those whom she already has seen."

Claudia felt grateful to Mrs. Latham for not having forgotten her own ardent desire to do some work for her Master. If she might not teach in the school, she might speak soothing words in the sick-room. Strong sympathy was awakened in her breast towards the motherless girl, who was so deeply suffering from the effect of a sudden bereavement. Claudia recalled her own terrible anxiety after receiving the telegram from London telling of the illness of her father. Her imagination, the mind's quick eye, beheld with vivid distinctness the fearful scene of the falling of the ladder, which had crushed out the life of one victim, and with it all the happiness of another. Claudia quickened her steps, impatient to see the sufferer, and silently praying as she walked that she might be enabled to give some consolation to one so heavily afflicted.

Museum Street was soon reached. Mrs. Giles was evidently no unexpected or unwonted visitor. The landlady, who opened the door, shook her head gravely on being asked after the state of her lodger.

"Just the same; only growing yet weaker. Miss Leicester will scarcely look at food, and don't take enough to keep life in a bird. She scarce ever speaks—she never cries; a hearty cry, I take it, would do her a deal of good; but when she thinks as no one is by, she moans as if her poor heart was a-breakin'!"

Mrs. Giles did not require to be shown the way to the room on the first floor to which she now proceeded, accompanied by Miss Hartwood. Very gentle was Claudia's tap on the panel; she had a dread of intruding on the sacredness of grief; and had not Mrs. Giles opened the door, and silently motioned to the young lady to enter, she would scarcely have ventured, stranger as she was, to show herself to Miss Leicester.

The room was small, but perfectly neat; the white-curtained bed faced the door. On it, not in it, dressed in the deepest mourning, which made her pale and delicate complexion appear more white by contrast, lay stretched the poor orphan maiden. Claudia started as her gaze fell upon the sufferer before her, and could hardly stifle an exclamation of surprise, for in the invalid—the bereaved mourner—she instantly recognized one who had been to her as her evil genius—the deceiver—the betrayer—Helena!



CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE WEB OF DECEIT.

IF a meeting so sudden and unexpected was startling to Claudia Hartswood, its effect was overpowering on the wretched girl who thus found herself confronted by one whom she had deeply injured and cruelly deceived. To the astonishment of Mrs. Giles, the feeble wasted invalid, who had appeared scarcely able to move, sprang from the bed upright on her feet, gazing wildly on Claudia, as she might have done on some dread apparition. The impression upon the good visitor's mind was, that the unhappy young lady had gone out of her senses.

"What brought *you* here?" gasped Helena, her very lips white with emotion. She grasped the post of the bed, as she spoke, with her thin nervous fingers, to keep her from falling.

Claudia might have given a stern reply to such a question. She might have spoken of that retributive justice which the heathen spoke of under the name of Nemesis, which, even in this life, so often

pursues the guilty. But Helena looked so fearfully ill, and had already suffered so much, that Claudia had not the heart even to question, far less to upbraid her. She joined her persuasions to those of her companion to induce Helena to rest again on the bed ; both feared that the miserable girl might otherwise drop down dead where she stood. But Helena remained standing, her glassy eyes fixed upon Claudia. She repeated the question, "What brought you here?" and added in a sepulchral tone, "I know you have come to search for these papers."

At this moment there was a gentle tap at the door, followed by the entrance of Mr. Latham and his wife, who beheld with astonishment the scene before them.

"What is all this—what has happened?" exclaimed Mrs. Latham, naturally drawing the same conclusion as Mrs. Giles had done, from the wild excited appearance of the sick girl, as she stood clenching the post, with her long dark hair streaming back from her ghastly, agitated face.

"This is Helena the nun," said Claudia, in a low tone, to her friends; "it is no chance that has guided me here this day."

"No chance indeed!" cried Mr. Latham; pity for the sufferer before him, blending with indigna-

tion on his discovering the real character of one who had excited his strongest compassion. With a gesture of authority the clergyman made the invalid suffer herself to be replaced on the bed; and Claudia, at a suggestive glance from Mrs. Latham, brought a glass of water which stood on a table near, and offered it to the lips of Helena.

"Not from you—no—no—not from *you*!" muttered the unhappy girl, pushing aside the proffered glass, and turning her face towards the wall.

"Let me speak to her," said Mr. Latham, whose pity for the guilty did not render him neglectful of the interest of the innocent. At the wave of his hand his wife and her companions retired a few paces back, leaving to the clergyman the office of addressing an unhappy wanderer, and urging on her the necessity of making such full confession and reparation as could alone prove sincerity of repentance.

"I do not marvel that you have found no peace—never can you find peace while a guilty secret is weighing on your conscience," said the minister of the gospel. "Through you the happiness of a home has been wrecked, the character of an upright man has been traduced; what your object and motives have been I know not—but this I do know, that while there is mercy and forgiveness offered

even to the most guilty, none dare hope to receive them while persisting in treading a path of deceit. I demand of you, Miss Leicester—Helena—as you value your soul, tell me what has become of those papers which you took from the cabinet in that dwelling into which you were admitted by the ill-placed confidence of one whose friendship you won under false pretences.”

“Sewn up—in that pillow,” murmured Helena in a scarcely audible tone, pointing to one on a chair that was near her.

Claudia could scarcely refrain from springing forward and possessing herself of the treasure at once. It seemed as if her earthly hopes, her father's honour, happiness—everything—were placed within reach of her hand. But she restrained her impatient eagerness, knowing that it was better to leave the conduct of the affair in which she was so deeply interested, to the friend in whom she could confide.

“There are writing materials, I see, upon that table,” said Mr. Latham; “I will take down Miss Leicester's confession from her own lips—my wife and Mrs. Giles will sign the paper as witnesses. It may be of the utmost importance to have a legally attested document proving how Lady Melton's papers came into our possession.” As the clergyman spoke, he was tearing open the cover of the

cushion, and revealing in the very centre of the stuffing of horse-hair a sealed packet containing papers. Mr. Latham acted thus promptly because he was uncertain how long the wretched Helena would have the will or the power to confess. She had been startled into speaking the truth ; but deception had, alas ! been the habit of her life—and where such has been the case, candour can scarcely be looked for, even from one on a death-bed. It took Mr. Latham more than an hour to draw from Helena's unwilling lips anything like a consistent and clear account of what it was absolutely necessary to know in order to understand the strange mystery regarding the abstraction of the papers. Instead of attempting to describe all that passed during that painful interview, I will briefly relate the leading points in the sad history of Helena Vane.

Her mother, whose name was Theresa, had been the daughter of a strolling player, and had commenced her own career as a "little prodigy," afterwards appearing as an actress upon several provincial stages. Such a life was not calculated to raise the tone of her character ; and Theresa was one of those who appear never to have been possessed of a conscience. By an unhappy marriage with a man following the same profession as herself, Theresa became

the mother of Helena ; but even maternal instinct had little power in her hardened heart—she treated her babe with the same neglect which she herself experienced from her husband.

Nearly twenty years after the birth of Helena, a severe cold having deprived Mrs. Vane of the powers of her voice, her career on the stage was necessarily closed, and she sought a less exciting and fatiguing kind of existence as a lady's-companion. By means of her singular tact and daring forgery of references, Mrs. Vane, under the name of Miss Eagle, became the confidential attendant of Lady Melton. After the unprincipled woman had been long enough in her new position not only to acquire considerable influence with Lady Melton, but to obtain intimate acquaintance with her private affairs, some facts regarding Theresa's antecedents were accidentally discovered ; and Lady Melton, indignant at the fraud which had been practised upon her, dismissed "Miss Eagle" with contumely at an hour's notice from her home. The lady was still not aware of her real name, nor of the fact of her being a mother.

The dark soul of Theresa Vane became possessed by a fierce spirit of revenge ; she resolved that Lady Melton should pay dearly for having detected and exposed her. Mrs. Vane was well acquainted with the details of the impending lawsuit between Lady

Melton and Sir Edmund Curtis—she had assisted in arranging the papers by means of which the former hoped to make good her claim to a large property then in the possession of the latter. Theresa found, by secret inquiries, that Lady Melton, not long after dismissing her companion, had engaged Mr. Hartswood as her professional adviser, and had, after the interval of some months, entrusted to him the care of her papers, preparatory to commencing her lawsuit against Sir Edmund Curtis. Mrs. Vane resolved to become possessed of these valuable papers, and found a tool with which to work her evil designs in her daughter Helena, who had been brought up in France, and who had inherited her mother's talents with more than her mother's attractions. Unhappily, Helena had also the dissimulation, and power of acting an assumed part, which enabled her, as the reader knows, to carry out the scheme devised by her unprincipled mother.

When the Vanes had possession of the papers, the next question was, What use could be made of the stolen documents? Theresa, with whom covetousness was almost as strong a motive as revenge, regarded them as the means of securing to herself a provision for the rest of her life. But the papers were to her something like what gold is to the solitary inhabitant of a desert island. The police were

taking such energetic measures to discover the person who had broken into the lawyer's cabinet—so large a reward was offered for the apprehension of such person, that the Vanes were afraid to take any step that might lead to detection. Theresa knew the immense value of the papers to Sir Edmund Curtis, but she dared make no overtures to a gentleman of character so much respected, lest such overtures should result in her daughter being handed over to the police.

But Sir Edmund was old, and in very bad health. His son, fond of horse-racing and gambling, would probably be an easier person to deal with, and was likely ere long to enter into possession of his father's estate. In time the police would relax their ineffectual efforts to track out the pseudo-nun. Should young Curtis prove as unprincipled as Theresa expected to find him, the possession of papers on which depended his retaining £200,000 might be worth to the Vanes a sum of hush-money sufficient to support them in comfort and ease.

"I will bide my time," said Theresa Vane, little dreaming how short her time upon earth was to be. In the midst of her plots and her schemes, the wretched woman was suddenly cut off by the fearful accident of which Mr. Latham had been a horrified witness.

Helena found herself alone and desolate, deprived of the fatal guidance which had led her so far astray. The miserable girl, brought up without even moral training, could scarcely be said to have any sense of religion, but she was not without a strong tincture of superstition. Helena could not help regarding her mother's awful fate as a judgment; it terrified and almost overwhelmed her reason. Haunted by the thought that Mrs. Vane's death might be connected with the possession of the stolen documents, Helena yet had not sufficient moral courage, or even sufficient energy of decision, to make her resolve on parting with "the accursed thing" that had brought such evil upon her. It is probable that Helena, with sealed lips and terror-stricken soul, might have lain on that sick-bed till death should have closed her last door of retreat, had not the sudden appearance of Claudia startled her into breaking silence at last, and Mr. Latham induced her to unburden her conscience of the "perilous stuff" which lay so heavily upon it.





CHAPTER XXIX.

A SUDDEN CHANGE.

WE left Mr. Hartswood pacing up and down his dingy apartment, revolving in painful thought the difficulties of his position. Tidings which he had that morning received of the death of Sir Edmund Curtis brought these difficulties more vividly before him. Mr. Hartswood had formed of the baronet's successor an opinion similar to that held by most of those who knew him; the lawyer believed him to be a man who would have little scruple in destroying papers which, brought forward in a court of law, might deprive him of half his fortune. Mr. Hartswood thought it more than probable that the valuable documents which had been abstracted from Friern Hatch were by this time resolved into their original elements; and that Tom Curtis, if he had not actually prompted the daring robbery, was at any rate reaping the fruits of the crime committed by another.

James Hartswood's temples ached with a dull

pain, as if pressed in with a band of iron. Every petty annoyance had become to him now a source of intense irritation, which he seemed to have no more power to overcome than if he had been a sickly, peevish child. It worried him to catch his foot in the threads of the faded carpet, where time had almost worn it into a hole. It worried him when a Savoyard with his monkey chanced to find his way into Little Bread Court; the droning grind of the barrel-organ almost drove the lawyer wild. This annoyance was soon got rid of by energetic gestures from the window, but it was quickly succeeded by others. Some neighbour had fixed upon that morning for beating carpets, and Mrs. Maul's children had taken to the diversion of fighting on the stairs. Mr. Hartswood felt a strong impulse to rush out upon the young urchins, and enforce good manners with his cane.

"I fear that I am growing crazy!" muttered the lawyer to himself; "I have had enough to make me mad. Ruined by the deceit of my child, on whose candour I could have staked my existence; insulted by rivals; forsaken by friends; suspected by the world; when riding on the full tide of prosperity, suddenly stranded,—why, there's actually a carriage entering the court to rub the grass from the stones!" cried Mr. Hartswood, interrupting himself in his

gloomy soliloquy, as the clatter of hoofs and rattle of wheels echoed in the narrow enclosure. Mr. Hartswood walked to the window, and recognized, with anything but satisfaction, the blue and red liveries worn by the servants of Lady Melton. He was yet more annoyed at catching a glimpse of Sir Tybalt's huge whisker within the conveyance. The lawyer had but slight acquaintance with the cousin of Lady Melton, but had read through his shallow character at a glance, and had scarcely endured with patience his overweening conceit and self-importance, when there had been no personal discourtesy towards himself expressed by the knight. Now Mr. Hartswood had an intuitive perception that Sir Tybalt had come in the character of a bully, and that an unpleasant scene with the knight was certain to ensue. The bull ranging the open field may care little for the barking of a cur that it can silence in a moment ; but on the bull baited at the stake, smarting from a dozen wounds already, and almost goaded to madness, the attack of the same cur may inflict intolerable pain. Mr. Hartswood could no longer trust his own self-command ; his nerves were quivering and vibrating, the most despicable adversary would, he knew, have him at advantage ; the lawyer was painfully aware that he was not what once he had been. With a spirit of defiance and gloomy desperation

James Hartswood heard the rustle of Lady Melton's silk dress, and the heavy tramp of Sir Tybalt's boots as the visitors mounted the stairs.

The lawyer received his unwelcome guests with formal courtesy. Lady Melton, a little fluttered and excited, took her place on the black horse-hair sofa ; but Sir Tybalt stiffly declined the proffered seat—he preferred standing ; and Mr. Hartswood preserved his erect position also, the two men facing each other like pugilists in the ring.

After the first stiff interchange of courtesies was over an awkward silence ensued, broken only by Sir Tybalt's little preparatory cough. Lady Melton was unconsciously buttoning and unbuttoning her light kid glove, and avoided looking at her lawyer. Her cousin spoke at last, with more than his usual pomposity of manner.

"Perhaps you may not have been informed—perhaps you may not have heard, Mr. Hartswood, that the decease of Sir Edmund Curtis occurred last night."

"I am aware of the fact," was the curt reply.

Another significant cough from Sir Tybalt. "And may I venture—may I presume, sir, to inquire how you became possessed of the information?"

There was nothing necessarily offensive in the question itself, but a great deal in the tone in which

it was put, at least so it seemed to Mr. Hartswood, whose spirit was like gunpowder, needing a very small spark to cause an explosion. With ill-suppressed passion quivering in his voice, the lawyer replied, "May I ask, sir, why it concerns you to know?"

"Mr. Hartswood, very few words of explanation are necessary," said Sir Tybalt, with the air of one commencing a studied and lengthy oration; "I could wish that you had been present the other day when a gentleman with whom I have the honour to be acquainted mentioned—I know not upon what authority—but mentioned that your relations with the family of Curtis are of a closer nature than—than under existing circumstances—you *understand me*—is to be desired."

"I wish that I had been present," cried James Hartswood, with flashing eyes, "that I might have had the satisfaction of kicking the impertinent libeller down-stairs!" The lawyer looked so fierce as he uttered the sentence, so likely to act out his words, that Sir Tybalt intuitively drew back one step, and Lady Melton, alarmed at the prospect of a serious quarrel, interposed in a feeble attempt to soften the irritation of her professional adviser.

"You misapprehend the meaning of my cousin, Mr. Hartswood; I'm sure that he never—"

But Sir Tybalt, with the bull-dog obstinacy of his

nature, would not suffer the lady to divert him from his attack, and interrupted her in the midst of her sentence.

"There must be no room for misapprehension on any side," quoth the knight; "it is expedient, necessary to come to a full and clear understanding. You cannot be ignorant, sir, of what is the common subject of talk in every club-room, of what has even been hinted at in the periodicals which are circulated through the kingdom. Most valuable documents were entrusted to your care—nay, Lady Melton, I must and will speak—most valuable papers, sir, I repeat, were entrusted to your care;—where are those papers now?"

"Here!—here!" exclaimed the voice of Claudia, who, as the eager bearer of good news, had suddenly entered the room as the last words fell from the lips of Sir Tybalt. Claudia sprang towards her father, panting with excitement, and placed a sealed packet in his hand. The expression of Mr. Hartswood's countenance, the fierce eyes, the lips white with passion, the hand instinctively clenched, told Claudia more than the words which she had just heard that she had scarcely arrived in time to prevent a dangerous quarrel.

"The papers!" exclaimed Lady Melton, starting from her seat.

"The papers!" echoed James Hartswood, almost as much astonished as if they had dropped from the ceiling.

A sarcastic smile curled the moustachio-covered lip of Sir Tybalt. The sudden appearance of the lost documents, instead of dispelling, had served to confirm his suspicions. "They who hide well, find well," was the proverb which rose to his mind.

But Claudia had happily not come alone—Mr. Latham had followed close on her steps, a calm minister of religion, whose character carried influence, and whose words commanded attention. Mr. Latham was known to both Lady Melton and her cousin, and as soon as he explained in few words that he carried in his hand the attested confession of the pseudo-nun herself—the key to the whole perplexing mystery—curiosity in his hearers took the place of every other emotion. The clergyman became the centre of an eagerly listening group, as in a clear distinct voice he read aloud the confession of Helena, after explaining briefly the circumstances which led her to make it. Mr. Latham was only interrupted by occasional exclamations from Lady Melton, who now, for the first time, heard that she owed the loss of her papers to the malice and revenge of "Miss Eagle," and that a terrible fate had

overtaken the wretched woman in the midst of her evil career.

The countenances of the various persons forming that little group might have afforded, during the reading, a good study for an artist. Lady Melton, her lips apart, her gaze rivetted upon the reader, as she bent forward to catch every word, seemed to listen with eyes and mouth as well as with ears. Sometimes an expression of amused surprise flitted across her countenance, then flashed forth indignation. Sir Tybalt stood leaning against the mantel-piece, and had any one been at leisure to observe him, something of incredulity and dissatisfaction might have been traced in the lines of his brow and the manner in which he twisted his long moustache. It was more provoking to the pompous Sir Tybalt to be found mistaken in his judgment, than gratifying to know that his cousin was likely to gain a very large fortune. To be proved to have made such mistakes was no new thing for Sir Tybalt, but he was ever very slow to perceive that such was the case, and might usually be cited as an example of the aphorism that

"He who's convinced against his will,
Is of the same opinion still."

James Hartswood stood with folded arms, more deeply, though more silently interested than even

his client could be. Lady Melton had only a fortune at stake; he had his priceless reputation. Mr. Hartswood's mental condition might be compared to the physical condition of Mazeppa when released from his fearful position of being bound on a wild horse. He was half dizzy with the sudden transition from a state of despair to one of hope—he scarcely realized his own deliverance—he still felt, as it were, the aching pain left from the galling of the bonds from which he had just been set free. The flush of anger which had lately suffused Hartswood's face had passed away; under the absorbing interest with which he heard the confession of Helena read, the lawyer forgot for the time the existence of Sir Tybalt Trelawney.

Claudia sat a little behind her father, glad to be screened by him from the eyes of all observers. With her thankfulness for the recovery of the papers was blended a deep sense of shame. Her father's character was freed from all reproach by Helena's confession; but Claudia must still appear in the story as the foolish, self-confident girl who, carried away by romantic sentiment, had entered on a slippery course, and beginning by being a dupe, had ended by being a deceiver. Claudia felt deeply humbled; but she accepted the humiliation, not only as the just desert of her conduct, but as a

wholesome discipline for her proud, impetuous nature. Since her parent was no longer to suffer with her, Claudia would be content to bear the obloquy from which her high spirit naturally recoiled.

"It is a strange story indeed—a most singular story!" exclaimed Lady Melton, as Mr. Latham concluded his reading. "Had I had the faintest idea that Miss Eagle—I mean Mrs. Vane—had had a daughter, I should have had a key to the whole mystery. But I did not imagine that two such beings, compounded of malice and deceit, existed in the world."

"Great excuse is to be made for one receiving such a wretched education as did the unhappy Helena," observed Mr. Latham. "From early childhood she was never taught to distinguish between right and wrong; she breathed an atmosphere of duplicity, and who can wonder that her moral perceptions were blunted and her mind infected by the contagion of evil example. She is now apparently sinking broken-hearted into an early grave, and claims compassion and forgiveness."

"She has mine," thought Claudia Hartswood; "my deepest compassion, my fullest forgiveness. Oh, if I—brought up in a Christian home, taught to practise and love sincerity—could fall into lip-deceit, look-deceit, heart-deceit—how dare I judge

one who never possessed the blessings lavished upon me ! ”

Lady Melton's mind was too much occupied with the subject of her pending lawsuit to have much attention to give to the fate of Helena Vane. Turning towards her lawyer, who was examining with keen interest the contents of the packet of papers placed in his hands, she said gaily, “ Now that we have rescued our artillery from the enemy's lines, Mr. Hartswood, I propose that we settle the plan of our coming campaign. Mr. Latham and Sir Tybalt will help to form our council of war.”

But Mr. Latham's duties called him homewards, and after receiving warm thanks for the important aid which he had given in restoring the stolen documents to their rightful owner, he took his departure from Little Bread Court. Sir Tybalt also suddenly remembered a pressing engagement, and after, in a stiff awkward manner, uttering a few words of congratulation, which might be taken by the lawyer as a kind of apology, he went forth a sadder, though, it is to be feared, a not much wiser man.

Then, leaving her father and his client to talk over business, Claudia, with rapid step, sought her own room. She needed quietness and solitude after the excitement of that most eventful day. As soon

as she had entered her apartment, and closed the door behind her, Claudia fell on her knees, and poured out a fervent thanksgiving. And with thanksgiving was mingled prayer that she might never forget—never let go the fruit of bitter experience gathered in the desert of tribulation. It is by such experience of failure and error that Christians learn their own sinfulness and weakness, and are led to exchange self-confidence for lowly trust in a Strength not their own.





CHAPTER XXX.

THE RETURN.

SUMMER has departed ; autumn passed away ; winter has come—but winter so mild in its breath, so radiant in its brightness, that the sun each morn melts away the filagree frost-work with which night had silvered each blade and spray. Still golden leaves cling here and there to the boughs of the elms, and the latest lingering flowers smile in December sunshine.

It is a bright joyous-looking morning, and the fresh crispness of the country air is breathed with a keen sense of enjoyment by Mr. Hartswood, as, accompanied by his daughter, he is whirled away in an open carriage from dingy, fog-swathed London. He is snatching an interval from professional labours to spend his Christmas holidays at Friern Hatch, his rural home. There is calm satisfaction on the countenance of the lawyer, as he leans back in the soft-cushioned carriage ; he looks—what he is—a successful man. No longer the worn, harassed,

irritable being whose haggard features told of the pangs of a wounded spirit, James Hartswood's health has returned through the stimulating effects of employment, hope, and success. He was first introduced to the reader as regarding his great pending lawsuit as a general might regard an opening campaign; now he is as the same general returning from it in triumph—for his logic and eloquence have won a victory, a just verdict has been given in favour of his client, and the reputation of her counsel is higher than it ever was before. Therefore Mr. Hartswood laughs and chats gaily as the carriage rolls swiftly along the road, bordered with elms, which leads to Friern Hatch.

Claudia is more pensive and thoughtful than her father. Perhaps her mind reverts to the solemn scene at which she was present but a few weeks before, when she bent over Helena's death-bed, and the poor girl expired in her arms. There was some gleam of hope flickering over that death-bed, for the unhappy Helena had expressed deep repentance for sin; yet where deceit has been interwoven with every action of life, a shadow of doubt as to the sincerity of words and even tears must rest on the minds of survivors. It is the just punishment of those habitually false, that truth itself is not believed if it comes from their lips.

It had been a great satisfaction to Claudia to be enabled to act a sister's part towards the woman who had so cruelly deceived her. The lodging in Little Bread Court being exchanged for one not far from Museum Street, had rendered it easy for Claudia to pass much of her time in nursing Helena. Never, perhaps, can Christians more fully realize that they are working for their great Master, than when they follow His example in doing good to those who have wronged them.

"Not sorry to escape from London, eh, Claudia ; and leave its smoke, noise, and bustle behind you?" said Mr. Hartswood, in his old affectionate tone. "You will own, though, that our last abode was a great improvement upon that dreary dungeon, Little Bread Court, in which I so ruthlessly buried my poor little girl alive."

"The place was no paradise," observed Claudia ; "and yet I have dearer, sweeter recollections connected with the gloomy little court than with any other place in the world !"

"What, notwithstanding the extinguisher which I put upon your laudable ambition to become a ragged-school teacher?" laughed her father. "I was a little hard upon you, Claudia. But though I still think that you must wait for the appearance of your first white hair before you dive into London

lanes and alleys to hunt up ragged recruits, I have no objection to your making yourself useful in a quiet way in the country, where you will again be so much alone during my daily absence in London. You can ask your friends the Holders to cut out a little parish work for you; there's nothing like work for bracing the spirits" (the lawyer spoke from his own experience); "and there never was a truer proverb than 'Better wear out than rust out.' Only mind you, Claudia," continued her father, as a turn in the road brought within view of the travellers the picturesque gables of the convent, "there must be no more meddling with nuns, either with false or with real ones."

"Oh, dear father," exclaimed Claudia with emotion, "the lesson which I learned in the summer was far too painful to be ever forgotten. My folly and presumption cost me too dear."

"You meant well, you meant well," said the lawyer good humouredly, for all his irritation and anger had long since passed away; "to convert from error and protect from oppression are noble works in themselves; the lesson which you have learned is simply this—that we defeat our own object if we attempt to do a right thing in a wrong way."

"And in a wrong spirit," thought Claudia, who

had traced all her errors to their source, the pride of a self-righteous heart.

Rapidly rolls the light vehicle along the familiar drive, up to the door of the bright pleasant home, which Claudia has not entered since the summer day when she left it with a spirit full of regrets and foreboding. Mr. Hartswood springs from the carriage and hands his daughter into the house ; his step as elastic, his glance as cheerful as before his troubles commenced. After giving a few brief orders, the lawyer went into his study, and Claudia, before taking off her bonnet and furs, passed into the garden and shrubbery. She was glad to be for a short time alone, to meditate over the past, and resolve the course which she should take in the future.

How many recollections, some very painful and humbling, were entwined with the objects with which Claudia now was surrounded. The trees stripped of their summer foliage, the narrow winding path strewn with dead leaves, the little murmuring rill, the creeper-covered bower, the dark fir from whose projecting branch had waved the scarf of cerise, all recalled to Claudia an episode in her life never to be remembered without regret. The healed wound leaves its scar behind. Claudia would have been glad had her father exchanged Friern Hatch for some other country abode where

she might have begun life as it were anew, formed fresh ties, nor felt herself hampered and cramped by difficulties resulting from former errors. Claudia had lost none of the fervour with which she had embraced spiritual religion ; it was still her desire and prayer to be permitted—even in the humblest way—to labour for souls ; had she entered a new sphere, had the Holders been to her perfect strangers, nothing would have been easier or more pleasant than to have offered herself to the vicar's wife as cottage visitor or Sunday-school teacher. But Claudia had been deeply hurt by the refusal of Emma to come and be with her at a time when a friend was most needed ; the lawyer's daughter had understood too well the cause of that cold refusal. Mrs. Holder had deemed the dupe of Helena no meet associate for her young daughter.

“And shall I force my company upon those who have shown that they despise me !” cried Claudia bitterly, as she threw herself down on the rustic seat in her shady bower. “Shall I, stamped—branded, as it were, in their opinion as one not to be trusted, beg humbly to be admitted to work with, or under, Emma Holder !” Claudia bit her nether lip, and drew herself up ; pride had been wounded—crushed—but it was not dead ; the pain which it inflicted showed that it yet had power

Claudia could not but be aware that in talents she was far superior to Emma, in earnestness and zeal, in every good work, she would be at least Emma's equal; yet Claudia felt that, even with her talents and devotedness, she might do harm rather than good, if she, a young inexperienced girl, should attempt to labour amongst the village poor independent of the pastor and the ladies of his family. If she did not work with those who knew every individual in the parish, Claudia might be a hinderer rather than a helper, and bring discredit upon her own profession of religion.

"Oh, how much easier it is to err than to undo the consequences of an error!" sighed Claudia Hartswood. "Fresh as I am from the school of adversity, I am far more likely now to be useful amongst the poor, than when I deemed mere intellectual powers sufficient for giving instruction in spiritual things. But I shrink with extreme repugnance from coming forward to offer my services to the Holders. I am crippled in my usefulness by shame, the fear of a mortifying rebuff. Shame; is that—can that be with me but another name for pride? Am I dooming myself to stand all the day idle at the gate of the vineyard, because at the first step I must stoop very low in order to enter?"

Claudia was ere long roused from her solitary

musings by the cheerful voice of her father calling to her from the garden. She instantly obeyed his summons. But ere Claudia had quitted her quiet bower her resolution had been taken ; what that resolution was shall be seen in the following chapter.





CHAPTER XXXI.

CONCLUSION.

SNOW fell during the night, the pure bright snow, throwing its spotless mantle over meadow and road, clothing the shrubberies, giving new beauty to every object that before was beautiful, and softening every harsher feature of the landscape. To a stranger from a Tropic land how wondrously lovely must appear the first sight of Nature robed in her shining garments of snow!

The boys of the Holder family are all out enjoying the first opportunity given by the season of pelting each other with snow-balls. The vicar with his wife and daughter are in their little parlour, where a roaring, crackling wood-fire diffuses its cheerful warmth around. Emma is seated close to the fire, with her feet on the fender. She has recently recovered from severe illness, which has left its traces in the greater delicacy of her features and the more thoughtful expression of her face.

The vicar has just been reading aloud from the weekly paper with which he indulges himself, a concise account of the close of the famous law-suit of Melton *v.* Curtis, while his wife plies her industrious needle beside him.

"A great triumph for Hartswood," observed the vicar, as he laid down the paper.

"He and his daughter came back to Friern Hatch yesterday, I hear," said Mrs. Holder, without glancing up from her work.

"Oh yes; I saw the carriage drive by, and Claudia, poor dear Claudia, looked up at my window!" exclaimed Emma, to whom the return of the Hartswoods was an event of no small interest.

"I have been thinking, my dear," observed the vicar to his wife, "that you might as well call at Friern Hatch to welcome her back."

"Not I," replied Mrs. Holder coldly; "I certainly have no intention of taking the first step to renew our intercourse with Miss Hartswood." And the lady stitched vigorously, as if the completion of her gusset were to her a matter of more importance than anything connected with the inmates of the house on the hill.

Emma could not refrain from sighing: she was very anxious to renew that acquaintance with

Claudia which, in her own heart at least, was ripening into friendship. She ventured on a suggestion. "Claudia might be such a help to us, mamma; she is so energetic and clever. You know that I was obliged to give up my Sunday-class almost as soon as I had begun it, and I am scarcely allowed to visit at all in the cottages as long as the winter lasts."

"Other qualifications besides mere energy and cleverness are required for teaching and visiting," observed Mrs. Holder.

"But, if we are to believe our friend Mrs. Latham, Claudia Hartswood has a great deal more," said the vicar. "In her note, which was written, I think, to remove unfavourable impressions made by that unfortunate burglary affair, Mrs. Latham writes that she knows no girl more conscientious and high-minded than Claudia Hartswood."

"High-minded; yes, that word may be taken in two different senses," observed Mrs. Holder. "My belief is that there is not a prouder girl under the sun than Claudia; she set herself up as a kind of standard of perfection, a censor of the rest of the world. Pride must have a fall, she has had hers, I only hope that it has humbled her a little."

"Are you not a little severe, my love?" said the vicar.

Mrs. Holder made no reply. It is possible that pride had something to do with the lady's aversion to "taking the first step" towards commencing anew her intercourse with the Hartswoods. Her maternal feelings had been mortified by what she had considered Claudia's assumption of superiority over Emma. Mr. Hartswood was rising rapidly in his profession it was now thought likely that he might, ere many years should pass, reach one of its highest honours; his acquaintance was sought by the gifted and the great. The vicar's wife was aware of all this; she remembered that at the time of Claudia's humiliation she had, so to speak, turned her back upon the motherless girl, and now to change her conduct towards her would be, in the opinion of Mrs. Holder, either to show vacillation of purpose, or to appear to worship success.

Again Emma sighed, hopeless of persuading her mother to show indulgence towards Claudia, for, with all her excellent qualities, the vicar's wife was somewhat deficient in the charity which thinketh no evil, while possessing a confidence in her own opinion which rendered it difficult to move her from any position which she had once taken up. The vicar, however, was not so easily discouraged as his daughter.

"Are you not a little severe?" he repeated, after a pause. "Let us suppose that Claudia Hartswood is humbled by the painful affair of the pseudo-nun; let us suppose that she has come back from London anxious to make up for the past, with the acquisition of a little self-knowledge and experience which are invaluable to a 'worker;' would you shut her out from a field in which she might really be useful, and force upon the poor girl the conviction that though the Master may have forgiven her error, His servants will never forget it?"

"Oh, if Claudia were really humbled," began the vicar's wife; but she was interrupted by the maid coming in to say that Miss Hartswood was at the door, and requested to know whether she could see Mrs. Holder.

"Claudia herself!" exclaimed Emma with joy, lighting up her pale face.

"You see, my dear, you are not left to take the first step," observed the vicar, as the maid retired, bearer of her mistress's request that Miss Hartswood would come in.

Claudia had chosen an hour when she expected Mrs. Holder to be alone, and coming, as she did, intent upon making an effort humiliating and painful, it embarrassed her on entering the room to find that both the vicar and Emma were present. The

kindly greeting of the former, and the warm pressure of the hand of the latter, reassured her, however, a little. Though the manner of Mrs. Holder was somewhat cold, it was not repelling; the words of her husband had had some effect on the mind of the lady, an effect much strengthened by the subdued and softened demeanour of the once self-confident girl.

Almost as soon as she had taken her seat, Claudia, with her natural straightforwardness, came at once on the subject which had brought her to the vicarage that morning. She spoke with heightened colour and downcast eyes, but with a frank simplicity which won its way with Mrs. Holder.

“When I was in London I asked my father’s leave to teach in a ragged school which was near, but papa thought me too young to do so. He told me yesterday, however, that he was willing that I should try to do what I could in this village. If you would only permit me to learn from you, to work under you, to help you in some—in any—way I should be truly grateful. I hesitated whether I should venture to ask you, after—after what happened in the summer, for I know”—here poor Claudia hesitated, and the good-natured vicar came to her aid.

"Oh, we'll find a nook for you," he cried, "and be heartily glad of your help. My wife has almost more work than she can manage with so many young ragamuffins at home, and as for our poor dear Emma," he turned fondly towards his daughter, "she has lately been quite laid by; but as she regains her strength, she will resume her duties with twice as much cheerfulness and spirit when she has a friend and companion like Claudia to help her in every good work."

The ice was broken, and all difficulties melted away like the snow on the pathway under the beams of the glowing sun. Claudia from that day entered upon a course of active usefulness, which, though begun in the obscurity of a quiet country village, was to extend in future years over a wide and important field. Claudia, in after-life, became an acknowledged leader amongst those of her own sex engaged in philanthropic labours, by her pen, her voice, her influence enlightening and comforting thousands. If the earnest and successful worker was ever then tempted to cherish a feeling of pride, or to listen with complacence to praise, she found a ready antidote to flattery from without, or presumption rising within, by recalling the humbling passage in her life which has been the subject of my story. Claudia had learned in a way that

had indelibly engraved the lesson on her mind that *the heart is deceitful above all things*; and that intellectual powers are in themselves but dangerous gifts, unless combined with, and subjected to, those which belong to the higher spiritual nature.



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